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SUBLIME THOUGH BLIND

M. M. Banaji

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SUBLIME THOUGH BLIND

A TALE OF

PARSI LIFE, MEN AND MANNERS

BY

M. M. BANAJI

(Blind for the last Seventeen years : aged 61)

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DOONYAI DOAR

SOODHARANOO SHIKHAR

PARSI PUTRI PRAKASH

SOCIETY STEW

SANOBER, APANG ADIBA } *Parsi Social Dramas*

BOODHVARNA VANDHA, *or*, LAL BUNDERJI
(A SKIT)

and

OTHER SKITS, ETC.

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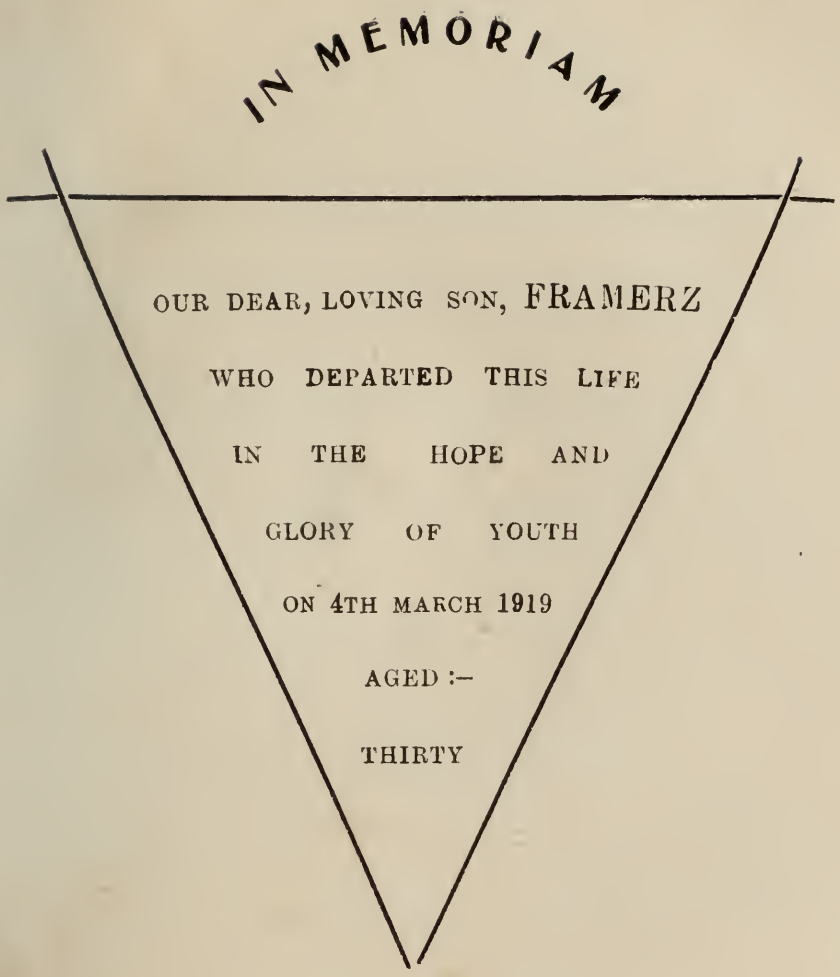
The Late Mr. FRAMERZ M. M. BANAJI,

Fellow of the Incorporated Phonographic Society, London.

Pitman's First Class Certificated Teacher

and

Author of "Shorthand Outlines Discriminated."



MAY HIS SOUL REST IN PEACE! AMEN!

INTRODUCTION

THE line between fact and fiction is not easy to draw. Fact is but fiction verified in some one's experience and the most successful fiction is that which not only approaches life, but that which transmutes itself into life—and life is but coherent fiction. It is the merit of this work, for which I am asked to write a preface, that it is written by a man of wide experience, one who has been in intimate daily touch with the life of his community in all its many-sided phases, and who has projected these living experiences into the harmonies of a carefully planned sketch of Parsi life which while it is faithful to facts idealises them for the purposes of his art. Life, in this work, is not a succession of sensational horrors : the morbid sentimentalism which is misnamed love is remarkably absent : the ethical vein may be perhaps a little too prominent : and the reader is hardly given opportunities to think for himself. All is clear cut, sharply defined, explicitly analysed. Is this the outcome of a feeling that the average Parsi cannot think for himself?

But when all is said, there remains one pleasing feature to notice. This work has been written by one who has been deprived of his vision by the dispensation of Providence ; it has been the outcome of introspective reflection on the part of one who has had his due share,—if not more,—of the sorrows and sufferings incidental to human life ; he has been a meek soldier of the cross, carrying his burden with courage and patience: this work is the outcome of his life, and if it manifests a little impatience, here too much of a sermonising strain and there too much of critical analysis, it must be taken in the light of that life, a mute but eloquent testimony to the possibilities which God opens out to his children even in the shadows of misfortune and the vicissitudes of sufferings. It is God's good work that is being done by the statesman guiding the destinies of nations or by the social worker in the slums or towns, or by the man at the desk who throws his soul into his work for the instruction and guidance of his fellow-men. If the last be doing his work deprived of the opportunities of sight and painfully conscious of the shadows of human vicissitudes, his work must be held to be unique indeed.

I confidently hope that the book will receive that cordial welcome from the English reading public which it so richly deserves.

P. A. WADIA, M.A.,
Professor, Wilson College.

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A-PROPOS

THE ignorance displayed even at the present day on Indian matters by men in England and over the Continent is so palpable that it cannot but form a subject for jest with us Indians. It is not infrequently displayed in the pages of novels and the leaves of journals. Instances of Bombay being mistaken for Benares, Calcutta for Calicut, Delhi for Dehra Dun, a Hindu for a Mahomedan and a Parsi for a Hindu have not been wanting. A pretty kettle of fish is made of Parsi, Hindu and Mahomedan names, their rites and rituals, their modes and manners. It would be too much to expect, of course, that British Officers when they return to the land of their birth after long and arduous service here would go about explaining and expounding Indian matters to their brethren at Home. We can only rely on Father Time and true writings and versions to remove such misapprehensions and misunderstandings.

If this story be read in an English or foreign clime let the reader remember that it is an Indian story the scene of which has been laid in busy Bombay, the 'Urbs prima in Indis,' and the second city in the whole of the British Empire. It is overgrown with public buildings and palaces, and teems with a heterogeneous mass of caste, colour and creed, from the nude to the semi-nude and from the simply clad to the gorgeous. Like the lamb and the wolf in the fable, the fanatic Arab and the mild Hindu, the Turk and the Tartar, the Chinese and the Japanese, the Jew and the Armenian—down to the low caste Mahar, and no less the English, the French and the Italian and a sprinkling of almost all nations over the world,—literally drink at the same fountain and sleep under the shade of the benign British *Raj*. The German was not an exception. He lived as freely and as happily as any other tribe, until his suzerain's own misdeeds necessitated his exclusion.

But it is not with them, reader, that this story deals, or that thou hast to associate. Amongst this multitudinous mass is a handful of the scions of the old Persian race—the sons of Iran—who are said to have domiciled in these parts nigh upon twelve hundred years ago, but whose ancestors as a matter of fact landed here and subju-

gated and formed territories and dominions much earlier. I am speaking of the Parsis, the followers of Zoraster, who are a small tribe barely numbering ninety thousand—men, women and children included—all over India. To this famous sect, the author of this book has the honour to belong. We are second to none in the British dominions—zeal, enterprize, culture, push, pluck, wealth, education and above all staunch loyalty to the British *Raj* taken together. Positive proofs of the greatness and glory of this tribe and of their *mahals* and monuments have been discovered in the excavations which are now being made at Patli Putra in Rajputana by the well-known Dr. Spooner. Members of this famous tribe were the first to cross the seas and settle in Europe years ago. Two of them have sat in the British Parliament. It is from the descendants of this distinguished race that the principal characters of this story have been drawn. The English and foreign reader might well feel proud and glad to have this opportunity of greeting them.

It is not my wont in my novels to tire the reader with long descriptions of the face, form and figure of my characters. Suffice it to say that we Parsis are mostly middle-sized, wheat-coloured, of well cut features and fairly well built. We have no ladies with cherry cheeks and rosy lips or with colour or crimson. You should not expect their colour to heighten, though occasionally you may see some sweet blushes rising to their cheeks. They dress in *saris* and blouseswith white *sudhra*, the emblem of their religion, skirting round. The *sari* is one length of silken drapery or robe, which falls in graceful folds over the wearer's person, collecting in beautiful curls at the slender waist. Our males do not glow with the bloom of the western clime, though some of them are strong and healthy. They are close-shaved and mostly wear the English costume. Some of them have recently quarrelled with their moustache and keep it at a safe distance. Smoking, of which our ancestors very advantageously and rightly steered clear, has caught us in its grip and so have the western racing, dice, cards and drinking vices.

The Parsi dialect is chiefly *Gujrati*; but a considerable section speak and write English with the ease and freedom of an Englishman. To be brief, we are an enlightened and advanced race, though like all advanced races our follies and foibles are not a few. We progress and retrograde. We learn many a thing and

unlearn not a few. We have religious fanatics, humdrum journalists and newspaperwallahs, soap and bubble reformers, tall talkers and little doers, in legion. We have an over-abundance of men of law and medicine, academical dignitaries and devotees, and what not. Are our ladies backward ? O dear, no ! They are to the fore and very forward too. Year after year sees them wear the academical robe and the indispensable glasses. They vie with and hold their own in many matters against the sterner sex. Bodies of them work for the weal of womankind and carry consolation and succour to many a house waddling in woe. Tarry here, reader, until I take you on to our hearth and home.

AVANT-PROPOS

"MY life lives in my love, and my love lives in my blindness."

Mortal man has always thought blindness a curse. Reader dear, how couldst thou be an exception? Wert thou so, thou wouldst be superhuman. They say and thou sayest in common with them, that life without light is living death and that a blind man or a blind woman is but buried alive in a moving grave.

The writer of this story has been blind these seventeen long years and more and he has never thought his affliction a curse. He has subscribed to the article of belief which declares that the conditions of human happiness are independent of bodily affliction and that it is even possible for bodily affliction itself to take its place among the ingredients of human happiness. He hopes and trusts that this story, long before it is completed, will bring you round to the same way of thinking. It is a home-made dish served out to you in the good old homely fashion to suit your palate and the writer trusts it will prove palatable.

Romances and adventures are the rage of the day. Cinemas have let them loose upon our heels like a pack of wolves. As an American writer has said, most folk can find enough squalor and unhappiness at home, without going out and looking for them for amusement.

In this tale you will find so much squalor, so much thrill, so much comradeliness, so much happiness mixed with unhappiness, so much justice mixed with mercy and so much that is good and great that, for a little while you will have to lay aside your adventures and romances so full of their excruciating torture and ugliness, cruelty and infidelity, horror and abomination and physical deformities and repulsiveness.

With this little prologue, if you are ready to start, we shall begin anon.

SUBLIME THOUGH BLIND

CHAPTER I

FIVE YEARS AGO

"Thus oft the mourner's wayward heart
Tempts him to hide his grief and die,
Too feeble for confession's smart,
Too proud to bear a pitying eye."

KEBLE'S *Christian Year.*

"DOES a Mr. Feroze Patel live here ?" I enquired of what seemed to me to be a slight girlish figure, which flew out in response to the call-bell from the front room of a house at Grant Road.

"Alas, Sir," the girl spoke, or rather seemed to murmur through the tears, which must have welled to her eyes at my words. "Alas, Sir, my poor father has gone to heaven these five years and more."

"Your pardon, Miss," I said. "He was an old friend of mine, but our ways lay different and I had no idea of the catastrophe."

"Pray don't apologise, Sir. Being unacquainted with the sad occurrence, I suppose you must enquire. Pray, sit down, Sir ; but, ah you are....."

"Blind," I filled up the ellipsis. "A stern uncompromising word, my dear, but none the less true."

"As you are sightless, could you not tarry here a minute, Sir, till I go in and call Maiji [1] ?" And suiting action to

[1] Mother.

word, she led me by the hand and gently pushed me into a comfortable arm-chair.

She then went in and returned almost immediately with a message that her mother was busy with the servants and would be with us in a few minutes. A moment's lull, and then an ejaculation: "Is it not horrid to be blind, Sir?"

"Do you really think so, my dear young lady?" I asked.

"Why, you seem to think otherwise, Sir? I have always thought blindness a curse."

"You see, Miss, it depends on how different people take to it under different circumstances. The habitation of a mole though dark to our eyes the animal itself feels the place sufficiently lightsome. My definition of blindness is, learning to see without sight. It is a school, Miss, in which, were it not that the Almighty has willed otherwise, every man would do well to study. It is just as good as the School of Poverty. Blindness deprives us of the blessing of sight, but it opens out to the so called afflicted,—you see Miss. I am using the words so called advisedly from my own standpoint, —a vast vista of observation. The blind man observes without his being observed. The commencement of blindness is the creation of an inward sight. The blind sees the world as he never saw it before and would never have without that visitation."

It seemed to me that Thriti[1] (for that was the young Parsi lady's name) was getting gloomy and excited at the same time. Her lips seemed to quiver. A slight rustling noise told me that she had lifted herself partially from her seat and dropped back into it. Cause?—Some inexplicable excitement—curiosity so characteristic of the fair sex, but which is more often than never a virtue amongst males also, evidently inciting her to prolong the stranger's visit.

"How well you speak, Sir!" she observed after a momentary pause. "Do all blind people speak like this?"

[1] The name is taken from the name of one of the three daughters of Zoroaster, the Prophet of the Parsis.

"Why, my dear young lady, you don't mean to say, you have seen a blind man for the first time in your life? You see so many of them going about your streets and bye-lanes every day."

"Ah, Sir; but it is the first time I have been brought face to face, and *tête-à-tête* with the stern reality."

A moment's pause again. My guide, who was smoking a *bidie* [1] outside, re-entered at this juncture; but as if by mutual consent, we both seemed to forget he was present and like all beings of his kind, he betook himself to an available nook and went off into a doze. Talking of the guide, he is an attendant evil on blindness. Be you however accustomed to intelligent converse, you have nilly-willy to associate, aye, at times to exchange thoughts, with these men. Talk or hold your tongue. The pause was broken by another ejaculation from the younger one of the company.

"If it ever should be so—oh, if it ever should be so" she murmured and then as if recollecting herself she suddenly stopped.

"My dear young lady," I said, "you'd be interested to learn that with the creation of an inward sight, the blind becomes a little of a thought-reader. If you will allow me to read your mind, I shall tell you as correct as possible, what is passing within you now."

"Could you really?—could you really?" she said. "How entertaining it would be! Ah, Sir, bide a wee. Perhaps you will tell me what I am like, before proceeding with the thought-reading."

"With pleasure, Miss, if you will only let me run my aged fingers over your pretty face to feel it. Keep steady and do not flutter, the while I hold my blind mesmeric pen over your head. I am going to submit you to my blind mesmerism, without actually allowing the sleep to overtake you. You see, Miss, you are just within the sweet sixteen, an age when all is joy and blithe. When

[1] Cheap country made cigarette used by the lower classes of India.

I last saw you, you were but a child ; now you are almost a woman and wear the insignia of womanhood—the graceful *sari*. Your tripping-skipping steps told me as you flew out of the hall, that you are good-tempered and that you contain within yourself the elements of health and activity. If evidence were wanted in support of your disposition, the cordial welcome and the meet reception you gave me, supplied it amply. That you are neatly dressed and habitually clean, I could gather from the rustling noise of your trim dress and the hour of the day. It is not all girls of your age, Miss, that are up-and-ready-and-doing at seven of the clock in the morning. The lines of your features, if sweetness of the voice is to be the cue, must be singularly interesting."

My listener clapped her hands joyously, but I proceeded undisturbed. "Now about thought-reading," I continued. "You see, Miss, methinks with the hope of all future happiness and possession of earthly blessings, there is something on your mind. The deep interest you have taken at your age in conversing with a blind old fellow like me, tells me that the something on your mind is an evil which you are afraid will overtake you, if not now, in the near future—a something which looms dark on your horizon. Thought-reading demands exactitude. Your eyes are bad, Miss, for you wear spectacles. The words which escaped your lips a minute ago, 'if it ever should be so, if it ever should be so,' were the outcome of this fear, I should think. Ah, Miss, I am afraid, I am cruel : I have hurt your feelings ; I have roused your susceptibilities ; but, you see, I am helpless. You invited me to read your mind and besides it will not be without its own good."

At this, girl-like she melted into tears.

"My goodness !" she said. "If this is not thought-reading with a vengeance, I should like to know what else it is. I am indebted to you for your trouble, Sir. You have read my mind and

sketched me as plain as plain could be. I feel drawn towards you like to a father and I'll tell you what. My grandmother had 'Glencoma', a fatal disease, which deprives one of his or her blessing of sight, without giving any warning. My mother missed it; but my eyes, I understand, contain it. Ah, Sir, if it ever should come on, do you think I should stand it?"

"Certainly, Miss. The Lord keep it from you but if it is to be, it will be. The only thing as I have said before is, it all depends on how you take it. The primary thing is to prepare yourself for it. But pardon me, who is your doctor?"

The girl seemed to understand instinctively what I was driving at, for she immediately interposed: "Ah, Sir, it was not the doctor that hinted it. I overheard it but pray, Sir, is it true that the destruction of sight creates new powers within a living being? I have always been persuaded into that belief."

"No, Miss; savants in civilized cities have sate in solemn conclave over this. They have confabulated and the result of their confabulations is that without creating any new powers or faculties, blindness develops in us all our latent potentialities which may have till the time of the visitation lain inactive idle or undeveloped—in a word dormant. It is not all the blind that are born to be poet-laureates, editors or authors; but one does not know what one can do until one puts himself to the wheel. 'Give me my opportunity and see what I can do,' was what the famous Mr. Chamberlain once said at Birmingham. Come, come, Miss, cheer up, I guess you are getting moody. That is not the way to prepare for fight. It is possible that the doctors are wrong. More often than never they *are* so. Why, it seems to me that civilization and enlightenment would have gone on in the world, even if half of us were born sightless. Does that surprise you? Natural enough!"

The girl once more burst into sobs. I gave her time to quiet herself. Then half-mentally, half-questioningly, she spoke: "Ah,

Mamma was wrong, Mamma was wrong. I ought never to have been engaged."

"My dear," I interposed, "that is part and parcel of your preparations for the fight. Take my advice, my dear young lady, and if a suitable partner has come seeking you with the full knowledge of your predicament give yourself up to him. Blindness must have a helpmate. He or she may not be as clever as his or her partner. It is said, my dear young lady, that many a poet and author of high repute sought his helpmate in life amongst the ranks of mediocres and simpletons and these simpletons and mediocres carried them through splendidly. Old maids and bachelors are like the wares of 'Old Curiosity Shop,' but even bachelors and old maids, my dear, are known to pant for a different condition of life after they have finished four decades and are on the threshold of the fifth. My plight would have been all the harder if my lot had not been cast with a docile pliant partner. Marriage, my dear, is known to have tamed and trained, aye, even beasts. And that reminds me of a story."

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF CORRECTION : MATRIMONY

" Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure ;
Married in haste, we may repent at leisure."

CONGREVE.

" Misses ! The tale that I relate
This lesson seems to carry :
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry."

COWPER.

YEARS ago, in a far off region, there lived an Indian prince of fabulous wealth. He was a widower with an only child, a tripping girl of sixteen as fair as a fairy and as blithe as the lark, singing gaily and making the Indian sun pale before the sunshine she spread about her. A spoilt child though, you might say with Macaulay ' the spoilt child of her parent, the spoilt child of nature, the spoilt child of fortune, the spoilt child of fame, the spoilt child of society ; ' and to top all, I would add, the spoilt child of beauty. The king heaped his all on her. When money runs so free, there must be somebody to spend it. Zulikha the girl could not do so single-handed. Matron-like therefore her Dasi or old maid came to her help. This Dasi had an only son, a handsome man, but out and out a lazy loon. Fair looks were his only recommendation. He lived in luxury and literally rolled in money.

" Though blind, Isee it in your eyes, Miss, you seem to ask, ' Where did all this money come from, pray ? " '

" Quite my thought, quite my thought," my listener murmured ; and I proceeded.

The Dasi was a charmer. She charmed money and materials away. Her son saw a rich shawl on the king's shoulders one day and he must have it; a glittering turban the next but he must wear it; silken pants the third and he must needs put them on; golden shoes the fourth and he must wear them. "Mother," he said to the Dasi, "I must have this and that;" and the Dasi approached her glittering ward—the skipping merry girl, the reservoir of all her resources. "My dear Zulikha," she would urge, "it hardly befits the king to wear such an old shawl. Why it is almost getting shabby. Those shoes of his, they are getting so rusty, they are an eyesore. That turban of his is getting out of twinge, the king can surely get a new one." Thus the things were abstracted through the medium of Zulikha and passed on to Mr. Idlebones who decked himself out in them the next day. As it happened the king had a vast vista of open land in the rear of his palace. This vista was bespattered with artificial pools of water for birds to bathe in. A fair looking young man richly apparelled and gorgeously decked out not unfrequently used to cross this vista before entering the precincts of the city. If he happened to approach a pool of water instead of striding aside and going over the dry ground he would immediately remove either a costly *kamar-band* or band from round his waist or a shawl from over his shoulder or a gold embroidered turban from over his head spread it over the marsh and walk over it without so much as bestowing a second thought on the wasted apparel. The king seated one evening on the balcony which overlooked this vista stood aghast at the spectacle. "Vazir," he said, calling to his prime minister, "out with the history of this man. A word of untruth, and you lose your head." The Vazir made a clean breast of it. The king demanded to know what was the most equitable way of breaking this lazy loon into harness. "Sire," said the Vazir, "My word on it, marry this fellow off outright." The king rubbed his hands. "Thou art right," said he. Lazybones' lot was linked with a vixen

niece of the Vazir. She gradually abstracted the man's riches by her siren ways until she thought he was reduced to poverty. The vixen then sent him out into the wide, wide world on his own resources. His entreaties to the Vazir secured him the *dhobie's* or washerman's job on the king's establishment. My dear Miss, it is the custom in certain parts of India for *dhobies* to throw their washing burden in two equally distributed loads athwart the back of a bullock and to bestride themselves on the top of it to reach the *ghat* or washing place. Lazybones was riding his bullock in this way, down at heart and shabbily dressed, when, as chance would have it, he arrived at one of the pools on the king's vista. The bullock, after going a few paces in the marsh bent his knees and stuck into it. Do what Lazybones would he could not persuade the beast to move on. At last jaded all and spent with toil, a thought struck him: he bent low, lifted to his lips one of the animal's long and abandoned ears and whispered something into it. The beast snorted and foamed, his nostrils spread, his eye-balls flashed living fire and he got up on his legs. His master striding across rode off in triumph. The king who was a mute spectator of this from his balcony narrated the story to his Vazir and demanded to know the mystery. "Upon my beard," he said sliding his hand over the long length of it, "or explain this mystery within four-and-twenty hours or you lose your head." The Vazir beat about it all night and on the following morn presented Lazybones before the king. "Your most gracious and honoured Majesty," Lazybones piteously implored, "what modifies a creature so much in this world of woe and pain as matrimony? The mystery of the bullock's onward movement lies in a nutshell. When all I did could not move him I whispered in his ear, 'Get up, thickskull, and move on this minute, or I'll get you matched off'—I meant married, your worshipful honour, 'to that mischievous cow yonder.'

That, "finished the dolt, "was exactly what happened in the case of your honour's most humble and apologetic servant" ; and he fell flat on the ground. The king and the prime minister laughed till their sides split ; but from that date forward Lazybones, troubles ceased and for long after he was the most favoured menial on the king's staff.

CHAPTER III

A FIGHT AGAINST FATE

" How sweet in that dark hour to fall
On bosoms waiting to receive
Our sighs, and gently whisper all!"

KEBLE'S *Christian Year.*

THE story completed Thriti laughed heartily. It seemed to me that her eyes had filled with tears. " Go at it," I said, " that is the way to be happy and gay."

" Since you have fortified me so much, Sir, perhaps you will be so kind as to tell me how it overtook you. Did you have it when you were born or was it in the family ? "

" It was neither, my dear young lady. You might say I was lynx-eyed, that is the worst of it. The better you are off with your health and eyes the less you guard them. Drudging at my desk and reading late and early I never gave a thought to the preservation of this invaluable gift of God. The orbs, you see, are a most valuable trust from Heaven and no amount of care you bestow on them is ample. So you see, my dear, I was partly blind, even when I was not so. I was blind to my own interests inasmuch as it was not infrequently that friends warned me to look out. They said the rate at which I was going at the desk was ruinous and that I ought to draw the reins in. I am not a fatalist, but something led me on until clouds invaded my right orb. I went to a doctor, fear-stricken and down at heart. Now, just hear me, my dear, attentively. It is an old man's experience. Our ways lie apart, but it is quite possible that this experience will stand you in good stead. The first medico I approached was

a Jack-of-All who had just taken to Ophthalmology. His diagnosis was wrong. He set me on the wrong scent altogether. He injected a stuff called home-atropin into one of my eyes—I mean the one first attacked by the fell disease to dilate it. It was just the thing, a specialist said, he should not have done, considering the symptoms. When liquids failed, steel was resorted to. I have since often questioned myself, if it was at all the right thing for me to submit these invaluable orbs of mine to the touch of steel. Jacks-of-All diseases here have not to steal or purchase their subjects for experiments, as I understand they have to do across the seas. They have the subjects here in shoals for the mere asking. Diseases which before the spread of Western lore here, were cured by *jari-bootties* or jungle herbs by jugglers, gypsies and itinerant globe-trotters, are now called by long names and treated to the taste of steel. To cut a long story short, my right eye was subjected to one operation after another until the light went out of it altogether. This stunned me. It was a blow. It unnerved and unmanned me. What with the fear of complete coming darkness and what with the prostration brought on by the weakening drugs which they forced down my throat to assist my eyes at the expense of my person, I was brought to the very verge of the grave. It was some time before I could hobble about again. Then after a lapse, it came on into the other eye. And when it shared the same fate, it was a question, so to say, between life and death. Not that I was going to die, but I might have, if I had succumbed. It was then, 'awake, arise or be forever fallen.' The man in me then arose. I caught at the inevitable. I took to penmanship and plumbing. My most splendid ideas are those which I collect in my sleep. I have become a better dictator, not the Dictator of old Rome, but a dictator of my new business correspondence and figures ; a dictator of serial stories or novels ; a dictator of newspaper contributions and withal a playwright. I am on my legs from morn till eve canvassing business and meeting business diffi-

culties. I have seen more of men and manners and associated more, you might say, with all sorts and conditions of beings with my eyes closed than when they were open. I have telescopes of my own through the medium of which I see and read the world as I never did before. A new light has broken in upon me. People tell me, it is a brave fight you are making, Mr. B—. My answer is, brave because inevitable. So, you see, my dear young lady, what you should do at your age is to preserve your orbs and conserve their power and God forbid you get it after all, do not throw yourself on the tender mercies of a Cheap-Jack or a Jack-of-All here. Go to scientific parts where the best surgical skill may be available. If you cannot do this, avail yourself of the best ophthalmic skill here. The tactics of men of medicine and surgery even in the West like those of war and politics are changeable. A theory in vigorous rage to-day goes out of practice to-morrow. What is pronounced to-day is put out the next. God forbidding, if you get ' Glencoma' after all, make a fight against it as I have done ; and if you have a good strong helpmate he will pull you out of your gloomy abyss.

" I think I have told you more than was perhaps advisable. I hope I have not frightened you. Remember, my dear, I do not lay my darkness at the door of the specialists here. They were men of honour and doubtless did what they thought to be the best in my interests. Prevention is better than cure. If I had only thought of prevention, doctors' help would not have been necessary. And even if required it would have been more effective. Remember also that we cannot go back to the times of gypsy doctors and itinerant globe-trotters. It was all good enough in its days. We must keep pace with the times."

CHAPTER IV

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE

"There is no loss but change ; no death but sin ;
No parting, save the slow corrupting pain
Of murdered faith that never lives again."

MISS MULOCK.

"WELCOME, brother ! So sorry to have detained you," broke out the lady of the house—Thriti's mother, Jerbanoo, coming in where we were seated. I had seen her some years ago when her husband was alive. Thriti had told me that she was now nearly forty-five and that she still possessed her former health and vigour. I instinctively felt that like most Parsi widows she was dressed in a dark *sari* with fringe or border to match. Thriti's young brother Jal who was also described to me by her as a sturdy young lad of twelve hung on by his mother apparently indecisive like all boys of his age as to whether he should approach me or not. This I could gather from the mother breaking the boy's indecisiveness.

"Jal don't you shy. There let go my hand. Run to Mr. B—. Don't you remember what fun you had with him when he used to be with us in your father's lifetime ?" The boy ran to me without more ado. My fingers travelled over him and took in his measure. For a Parsi lad of twelve he was growing wonderfully well. Just then I caught him whispering to his mother :

"Can't he see, Maiji ? Why, I always thought God never gave light to be taken away. When He wants one to be blind, He sends him out into this world sightless."

"Tut-tut," retorted Jerbanoo, pushing the boy back to me with a jerk. "Jal! Just like yourself! You will always keep questioning..... Don't mind the boy, Sir. I have been telling him that the great Hormuzd (God) who has the power of giving and taking away life can take away limbs. It takes a great deal to convince him."

"Ah, Sir," interposed Jal, "when you get your hand into a machine it cuts it and you lose it. Your leg gets under a tram-car and off it goes. Street rascals bite off their women's noses or ears and they lose them. They don't bite off eyes! Sorab of the Fourth Form, whom I like so much, tells me: 'Jal, when a street blind appeals to you, take it for certain he is shamming.'"

"Just like Sorab," vociferated the mother. "Why, the young reprobate ought to know better at his age. O God, lend me strength to convince the child. Feroze knew so well how to do it." And she burst into a flood of tears. "Thriti is wiser, Sir," she said.

"But, Maiji, you forget the Baisaheb [1] is full four years my senior. Just see, Mr. B—, how the Baisaheb growls at me," said the boy.

"Jal, *Beta*, [2]" I said, "all beggars do not sham. Some are born blind and some are victims of the avarice of their heartless parents who wilfully blind them in their infancy to make a living by them. Indian princes of yore, *beta*, took away people's eyes by way of punishment. Pulling out eyes was not uncommon under the Mahomedan rule. It is not accidents alone, my dear boy, that deprive men of life and limb. A hand or a leg often becomes numb or useless owing to disuse. When one misuses his eyes or overworks them, he not infrequently loses them. A healthy digestion is often impaired by excessive use of food or drink. Small complaints, if neglected, bring on large troubles and complications. The diseases of parents are not infrequently

[1] Her ladyship. [2] Son or boy.

communicated to their children. So you see, Jal, all beggars do not sham and all blind are not born blind. The light of eyes can be put out even though the orbs be not pulled out. When you wish for knowledge, Jal, by all means seek it ; and your thirst therefor will be satisfied, if not by Thriti by your mother, and if not by your mother by your teacher."

" O, the teacher ! " growled the boy. " You are so green, Mr. B—. Why, there is barely room in our form to hang on to a bench or by a hook. There are sixty boys in our form alone. Poor dear teacher ! The less one enquires of him the better for he has to be answerable to so many. ' The big swells '—what they call the Principals—' have all the fat and cream ; we poor devils are the drones, they the bees,' so says Khurshedji Khara-Talao, [1] our teacher.

" Jal, Jal," the mother's wail went forth. It seemed there was a tale hanging by the teacher. He was a stuck-up youth and in his younger days, it was said, his companions had given him a good ducking in the Khara-Talao [1] for which he had a great horror.

" Mai, Maiji, but what can I do ? Didn't Bavaji tell me always ' my dear boy try and do not get a nickname for it will stick to you through thick and thin ; probably your children will inherit it.' Rascal Dinshaw tried to give me a nickname once and it cost him a couple of his teeth. That cured his impudence and saved me. Maiji, our Dastoor [2] Dorab-daroo told me it was a sin for God alone and after Him the dentist only has the right to take away teeth."

" And what did Bavaji say to it " ? I asked.

" O, Bavaji ? He smiled, winked at Maiji and said nothing. But the smile was very encouraging. Didn't you tell me, Thriti,

[1] A pond or lake, with waters of salty taste—a nickname.

[2] An advance or head Parsi priest.

Bavaji told you he liked very much what I did—aye, even admired it ? "

" I wish I had not disclosed it to you," said Thriti. " I vouch for it you will carry the tale to your wife and children, who will hand it down to your grandchildren. Don't you think Mr. B—, Jal is a coxcomb ? "

" Ah, Sir," interposed Jerbanoo, " the children are taking up all your time. We only lately heard of your affliction. Feroze always remembered you and spoke of you but we never dreamt what it was that kept you from us so long. Since Feroze died we have to pinch and scrape. This house which is called Meher Villa after my sister Meherbanoo belongs to her. We have hitherto managed to pay the rent but we are shortly moving in cheaper quarters in the next street. Sister would not reduce the rent and even if she did we should not like to be a burden on her. Feroze would not have liked it. I am selling out all I have to educate the children—that will be their inheritance. Feroze always said so. Likely enough when the children reap the benefit they will let me share it. I have great faith in God's mercy, brother B— and I try to instil the same into my children."

Just at this minute the clock struck twelve which is the hour for the midday meal. We Parsis have an aversion to allow visitors to leave at dinner time. Mrs. Feroze pressed me to stay and I did so ; only to make my way home an hour later with my sorry guide in a hack victoria. The guide had his feed too in the kitchen. If you have read about the Parsis, reader, you have probably known they are entertaining and liberal to friends and strangers alike.

When out in the open I stretched myself at full length in the vehicle and my mind wandered away to the idea of Meherbanoo asking her sister to leave the house when she was in so much distress. Ha, the world ! The world ! Would Jerbanoo have done the same by her sister were their positions changed ? A

little bird whispered into my ear : " No, friend of the family, certainly not." In the course of conversation I had extracted from Jerbanoo that Meherbanoo and her husband Ardeshir had a tough quarrel over Jerbanoo's proposal to vacate. Ardeshir was a good and true man. Though not a blood relative he felt for the family and he would not have them leave the house if he could help it. Meherbanoo was haughty and domineering,—not an instance but she overpowered and overruled her husband.

CHAPTER V

MOTHER OR STEPMOTHER ?

"*A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,*
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty ;
And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty
Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it."

SHAKESPEARE'S *Taming of the Shrew.*

IN another compartment of Meher Villa a grown up lady of about five and thirty in a gorgeous blue silken *sari* and blouse to match is seen of a Saturday morning knocking loudly at the door of an ante-room and calling out to Roshan [1] her little daughter of ten, to open it. It was Meherbanoo. I had seen her at her sister's. In the wake of affluence often follow vice and vanity. Meherbanoo had a temper of her own. She made it a point to vent it on her hapless husband Ardeshir and her little daughter Roshan. Towards the latter she acted worse than a stepmother. Another daughter of twenty by name Sherbanoo there was who was her mother's pet. This made up the family.

Ardeshir was a sharebroker. His temperament was pliant and placid. His parents had yoked this pliant horse to the restive mare in the old-fashioned Parsi way when he was only twelve and she two years his junior. From one extreme we Parsis have now rushed to another. We now marry when we are much past the marriageable age. We begin at the fag end of wedlock the wisdom of which is open to question. But curious enough match-makers and match-making mammas are still extant amongst us. They effect matches or rather set a match to them to make them burst into a conflagration. There is a sprinkling of love matches too by

[1] A proper name, but having a meaning, to wit, bright, glowing, shining, or full of light.

way of relief. Matrimony is thus a pretty kettle of fish, flesh, fowl and red herring, mixed together.

But to proceed with our story.

"Roshan, Roshan," cried the vixen. A strong term to use in connection with a lady, you say. But humanity is the same all over the world and happily for human kind the Almighty has given us an ample share of good with evil. Jerbanoo was gentle, kind, loving, indulgent and above all thoroughly selfless; Meherbanoo was haughty, unkind, unloving, unindulgent and to top all mighty selfish.

"Roshan, Roshan," towered the voice of the vixen much above that of the street-vendor and beggar. Pray, don't feel surprised, reader, civilized Bombay, progressive in many ways, is strictly orthodox in many others. The civic fathers do not include street-noise of itinerant vendors and beggars in the category of nuisance; to say nothing of mills and motors, cinemas and theatres and the tom-toms of Hindu mandirs or temples.

"Roshan, Roshan! *Dookti*[1]! What are you at? Open the door at once or I'll box your ears, pinch your nose and give you a taste of it."

"O Mamma, Mamma," cried a silvery voice from within, "what can I do? Pray excuse me it is not with me to open the door. Somebody has been here and locked me in."

"And pray who is that somebody? You won't tell it me, but I will tell it you. It is that wretched boy Jal. He is the curse of my life and will be the bane of yours. He is an out and out pest. He overruns the house and sets everything topsy-turvy. O, the wicked young jackanape! You are gone mad on him. I'll break the boy's head!"

"O Maiji, for God's sake pray don't take it on so," appealed the girl from within.

"But, *Dookti*, haven't I told you often not to countenance the boy? If you had only locked the door from within he would not

[1] A contemptuous term meaning hateful girl.

have dared to be with you. But you will not,—I know you will not."

"O Mammaji, what could I do ? He wrote all sorts of sweet things on paper slips, wound them up and pushed them in through the keyhole."

"And you, *Dookti*, doubtless returned sweet for sweet," snorted the vixen.

"How could I help it, Mammaji ? He calls me his wee wifie and little dearie : says if I don't give way he will carry me away. When I interpose you, he says : 'O, tut-tut, I'll do it in spite of a hundred such mammas of yours ; for will not your father stand by us?—Was he not so brother-like to my poor dear pa ?' That's how he goes on, Mammaji," said the girl.

"Ah, yes, and you sing on with him in the same strain ; don't you ? Hallo ! What's this ? Here's the key on the ground !" Lifts it up and opening the door she goes to the girl and gives her a good hearty shake till she is all in a flutter, quivering and shaking like an aspen.

"Have you done your lessons ? Have you washed ? Have you done your *kushti*[1] ? Said prayers ? Take this—and take that, girl, that's for your impudence." And blow upon blow came rattling down like a hammer on the girl's back, until Ardeshir broke in upon the scene and prevented further abuse of the maternal privilege. The minute the girl seemed as if she would run into her father's arms but looking at her mother's fearful eyes she stood where she was, spell-bound.

"Mehra, why wouldst thou be always after the girl ? Were you a stepmother, I could understand it. Why, for the life of me, I sometimes think some evil genius removed your own child and put this darling little Roshan at your breast when you were confined. Why stare at me like that ? The girl is an angel ; whereas you are ... "

[1] Sacred thread worn by the Parsis round about the waist.

" A devil ! Why don't you say it out ? Pray don't keep it to yourself. It will suffocate you. You are always taking sides with the hussy and spoiling her. Thanks to your interference all my corrections are wasted. But for you I could have brought her round long ere this. Had I known what was in store for me I would never... never ... "

" ... have married me," finished the artless Mr. Ardeshir. " Well, well, it would have been for the good of both of us ; but His ways are inscrutable." Then suddenly softening and climbing down, he essayed to prefer an appeal. " But Mehra, my darling, you never treated Shera so, when she was of this child's age, or ever before or after."

At this unlucky moment the subject of her father's thought glided in unperceived and stood by her mother's side like an advocate by the side of an impostor.

" Yes, Ardershirji " (Sherbano never deigned to call him father, for she was her mother's prototype), " I am always in your eyes. You never have a kind word for me, much less a kind thought. We are both thorns in your side,—always in your way and always troubling you. What right have you to interfere with a mother when she is trying to correct an incorrigible imp ? "

At the words " incorrigible imp " all the man in good Mr. Ardeshir arose. His brows thickened, he struck his fist on the table close by and glared at his elder child.

" Incorrigible imp ! " he cried, defiantly drawing the little girl to himself. " ' Incorrigible imp.' ! Sherbanoo, you ought to be ashamed at your age to say so. You are your mother's prototype. Her views shine out in you. Why, you will lead your husband a dog's life. He has a warning in me and if he has any sense he will take it up."

" ... and give me up. O, tut-tut, who cares for him ? Who wants him ? It is you, you Saheb, that want to force him on me ; you, who gave a promise to his father when on his death-bed that

you would marry me to him. Why are you tongue-tied now ? You have tackled and shackled me and you have left this little Baisaheb of yours free."

" Girl, girl, it was not I alone that did it ;—your mother drove me to it. There, let her deny it if she dare. She could not refuse her brother's request on his death-bed. But why can't you shake yourself free of the contract ! No Dastoor, if he is wise, will mutter prayers and sprinkle rice and cocoanut [1] over your head. Why the day he does so, the poor victim will be doomed."

" Fie on you for a father ! " cried tha elder vixen. " Now there," clutching at the little girl, who was pressing close to her father for protection, " leave that little wicked little imp alone. Every body knows how you spoil her. Don't make an exhibition of it. She is now a woman and see me dead if I don't make her wear a *sari* to-morrow."

" O Maiji, Maiji, pray don't, don't," falling on her knees the little girl beseeched. " I am not yet fit to wear a *sari*. Do you not think so too, Bavaji (Papa) ? I am only ten and feel so free and easy in this frock of mine. Why, at times I feel I could outrun even Jal who is such a good runner. But with the *sari*,—O, it will be so different ! "

" You see, Mr. Wiseacre," the well-trained wife's voice sounded again, " you see that wicked boy is always on her brains. Kill me if I am wrong but she will take to bad ways and give us a bad name. I had enjoined her to do her *kushti*, take up the prayer-book and say the *patet*. [2] "

" O Maiji," the girl implored once again, " how can I ? I do not understand a word of the *patet* and though I carry out your behest I am none the better for it. I always pray to *Khodaiji* in

[1] Sprinkling of small bits of cocoanut and rice is done by the Dastoor, at the time of saying the nuptial prayers. It is indicative of the bounty and plenty which God endows us with.

[2] A Parsi prayer which is practically a recantation or renunciation of and repentance for sins of omission and commission.

my own way to make you kind to me, to make me a wise girl and to teach me my duty."

"But, girl that's not repenting for your sins," said the mother.

"Fiddlesticks ! Sins indeed ! " muttered the father between his teeth. "Why, woman, it is a sin to ask this innocent little fairy to repent. It is blunt and hardened womanhood such as—such as yours that should do it. And as to the little girl wearing a *sari* and avoiding her cousin Jal, I shall see that she does neither. Why, Mehra, how hard-hearted you are ! One would think you would be kind to that poor afflicted widowed sister of yours, whose means are so slender and who has the care of two grown-up children on her shoulders. Why, there has hardly been time enough for their tears to dry."

"Oh, I see, you have been put up to plead for them ; but leave this house they shall. You may maintain them out of your ill-gotten brokerage, which you are hoarding up. It is God that ordains ; and if it please Him to call certain people to positions of poverty and others to those of affluence, who are you to interfere ? "

"But, Mehra, just think, if God be pleased to alter your relative positions, how would it then fare with you ? Would you then sing the same song ? " inquired the husband.

"Now, now, get you gone ; I am not a lazybone like you. I have lots to do and heaps to think of. Now hear me once for all. You had better leave the care of this girl to me entirely. Had she been a boy, I should have left his training to you."

"O, Mamma," interposed Shera rudely, "you could have done nothing worse. Why, this gentleman here is hardly fit to look after himself."

"Ardeshir," said the elder vixen not minding the younger one, "if you come in my way, I shall put this girl to a boarding school. We shall see whether you can then do without her and she without you. Now you little imp, go, clean your dirty looks and march

off to school. What ?—Breakfast—Tea ?—You haven't had them ?—All your own fault ! It will teach you not to waste your time with that little vagabond again. Ayah ! Ayah ! Throw her tea and slices out of the window or let Tommy have them."

It is difficult to say how long this family feud had lasted, had not the ayah announced that the *Kapadia*[1] had brought his wares for the ladies to see, that the baker was waiting with his bill and that the cook was awaiting his *verdi*[2] for the day. Those who knew Meherbanoo, knew well that once her fiat had gone forth it was folly to oppose it and that her word in regard to little Roshan was but law. Luckily Ardeshir unlike himself showed considerable pluck whenever his little daughter was set upon by her mother and sister. On all other occasions he was the same mild, meek, let-go give-way sort of man. " Live and let live " was his motto. Had it been Meherbanoo alone he might have rallied and ultimately asserted himself but the inroads of the two unnerved and unmanned him.

Bide a wee, reader, further on we will let you have a larger look into this precious family circle.

[1] A person who deals in *kapad* or cloth of sorts. 2. Orders.

CHAPTER VI

A PEEP INTO PRIVACY

In this great hour of my need :
I, oh, brother, thy counsel do seek.

"BUT, Mamma,—you haven't informed Mr. B—of Thriti's betrothal. I'll tell you what, Mr. B— hadn't you a dream ? I have plenty of them, when I am heavy—I am mean my stomach. Did you not dream, a young prince has come seeking this fairy and that the fairy is soon to marry, become a *bara* [1] *baisaheb* and make merry for ever ? See, see, please ; the Baisaheb's eyes have filled with tears. They are tears of joy. O, see, she has given me a pinch." This was said by Thriti's brother Jal, on my visit to this brighter part of humanity, some days after we witnessed the altercation between the darker part, as described in the last chapter. Let it be said to young Jal's credit that he was not heartless. He loved his mother and sister like life. It was only to draw them out from their gloom, that at times he tried to look extra exuberant. Once out of their presence, the memory of his departed father touched him to the quick, so much so that he went off into sulks.

Later on I learnt, and so will you, reader, that the tears that had invaded Thriti's eyes were tears not of joy but of deep-rooted sorrow.

"Jal, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You know, poor Mr. B—" Jerbanoo stopped short.

"... Can't see," I said. " We must always look the truth straight in the face, my good lady. And the children ought to be taught to do so."

[1] Bara baisaheb means a lady in high pose.

"O Mamma," spoke Jal much abashed. "I am really cruel, I am so sorry. I know Mr. B— cannot see and I shall not make the same mistake again."

"I know you will not," said the mother, "for you are a good boy. Mr. B—, as you were such good frinds with Feroze, perhaps you will permit me to seek your counsel in a matter of no little import to his family."

The children, well brought up as they were, took up the hint and left the room.

"You see, Mr. B—, my husband and my brother Aspendiar were great friends. Before they died, by their mutual consent and mine, our Thriti was betrothed to Aspendiar's son Erach. A similar engagement was brought about between my other brother Peshutan's son Jamshed and Meherbanoo's daughter Shera. Peshutan was rich ; and Meherbanoo, you know, has always an eye to the main chance. Now, Sir, the trouble is that Erach does not like Thriti though she tries to like him ; Jamshed does not take to Shera and she does not take to him. It seems to me that they are all at cross purposes. If the dear departed could only see it, they would reverse the arrangement. To me it seems that misery and nothing else stares the dear ones in the face. Oh ! What shall I do ? Oh ! What shall I do ?" murmured the agonised mother, wringing her hands.

"The remedy is simple enough," I said unceremoniously ; and suiting action to the word drew out a couple of matches from a box to which my fingers had unconsciously strayed and deliberately broke them to pieces.

"What, break off the matches, you mean ?" exclaimed Jerbanoo.

"Certainly," I muttered between my teeth. "Smash them to pieces and throw them out ; and the sooner the better. By way of illustration, I threw the broken matches out of the window, close to which I was sitting."

For a minute or two, Jerbanoo busied herself with her own thoughts and then exclaimed as suddenly, " Right you are ! Right you are ! It goes to my heart to think that I should undo what my dear husband and brother did. But if it must be it shall be. But what will Meherbanoo do ? Dear me ! She is so greedy, and so fond of the silver god, I am afraid she will not let Shera break with Jamshed."

This was a disclosure and I pounced at it. " Why, my good lady, what have you to do with Jamshed and Shera ? Perhaps you would like to have this Jamshed as your son-in-law ? It is indeed much to be wished for ; but wishes are not horses and all cannot ride them. It is quite possible, however, that Thriti may find a husband as good as Jamshed. So, trust in God, be not daunted and break off the match."

We shall drop the curtain over this scene here and let the young ones tell their own story in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII

EPISTOLARY AVOWALS

" Look here upon this picture and on this :
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers."

SHAKESPEARE'S *Hamlet.*

FROM Thriti to Erach :—

Meher Villa,
Grant Road,
Dec. 23rd. 19—

Dear Erach,

I have just done reading a novel in which an alienated but loving couple came together ultimately and lived happily ever after. It has determined me to see, Erach dear, if we cannot do the same, especially as it was our dear dead fathers' wish that we should be man and wife.

I don't call you dearest, as it seems to me that there will be time enough for that when we are married and find comfort and pleasure in each other's company. The love-making part of the business, I think, should follow and not precede marriage. Before it all is so hazy and doubtful. After it all is so sure and certain. Is this not true of our own case ? You don't take to me and I —I, well, I suppose I must confess it, not infrequently feel that I don't take to you. The fault is perhaps mine, perhaps yours, perhaps of both of us. My dear mother, who is more to me than life, feels deeply over this. It is this that has determined me to write to you and to see if we cannot make up. You have not been near me, Erach dear, for ages ; but I hope you will manage to be at Mrs. Mehelooji's Toddy [1] party next Saturday. Mrs. Mehelooji

[1] The pure white juice of trees known as tad, cocoanut and date trees, a very healthy beverage when used unadulterated.

was at ours pressing and coaxing, coaxing and pressing us all to attend and would accept no refusal. Mamma would not of course go, but hearing you are to be there, she consented to let Jal and me go. We can roam about there in the open fields and dream sweet little dreams of the future, Mamma says.

Just write a line to tell me, Erach dear, that you do like me after all and that you will like me better after we are married. To seal this sweet avowal, you will be at the party, of course.

Your affectionate little wife-to-be,

THRITI.

From Jamshed to Thriti :-

Harkness Road,
Malabar Hill,
Dec. 24th, 19—

Dear little Coz,

Thriti and treaty go so well together. I wish, Thriti, we could all make a treaty I mean, you, Erach, myself and Shera ; and that I take you, or rather you take me, and Shera take Erach. Why can't it be so ? Don't frown. Stranger things have happened. If you support me, the thing can be done as easy as swallowing water ;—but, now, don't purse up your lips and pout, though it makes a very pretty picture when you are at it. Yes, the picture, is before me in a neat little frame on my writing desk, while I write this.

But now about business. I am to be at Mrs. Mehelooji's party and something tells me you will be there also. Erach will run straight to Shera and Shera will receive him with open arms as they have it in the story. I expect you to do the same with me. But the picture here tells me you will not. At any rate I shall enjoy it. We can wander away with little Jal as our ward and watch and whisper sweet little tales,—of what—I leave you to imagine.

A word of reply will greatly console

Your loving,

JAMSHED.

From Thriti to Jamshed :–

Meher Villa,
Grant Road,
25th Dec., 19—

Dear cousin Jamshed,

Yours to hand.

I can never find it in me to blame you, but I think I must once more warn you against the way in which you are taking it on. Why, pardon me, but it is madness. Letters like this are most dangerous, cousin dear, for they might give rise to misconstruction and misconception. Father always told me, and so does mother, that matches and marriages are not of our own making. They are arranged by a Higher Will. And it should be none of our business to oppose it. I am trying to like Erach and you should do the same with Shera. Your virtues and worth surely cannot escape her. For the life of me, I cannot conceive of even Shera disliking you. I was for tearing this letter up, but something within me will not allow it. If it must go to you, I suppose it must, but, there, Jamshed dear,—promise me to tear it up as soon as you have read it.

Yes, I shall be at the party and expect you, my good cousin, to be on your best behaviour aud do nothing that will annoy Erach or Shera or disturb the peace and equanimity of the party.

More when we meet.

Always yours affectionately,
THRITI.

From Erach to Shera :—

Green Lodge,
Wadia Street,
Tardeo,
26th Dec., 19—

Dearest Shera,

What will you give me if I gave you a treat ? For I must have something in return. Nay, I mean to enforce the condition with

interest at 20%, when we are at Mrs. Mehelooji's next Saturday. Here read this letter which our Thritibai the Wise has written to me. You may keep it, for I don't care a wee bit for it. What say you to it ? Why, I would cut it, and so would you, to-day, were our old crones agreeable. That puppet Ardeshir, of course, does not count. Perhaps you will say we must wait and watch. It may suit you but it does not suit me.

So we are all to be at the party, eh ! Well and good. Fine for T— and J— ; and finer still for S—and E—. Is it not, dear ? I have determined, with your help, my darling, to make it hot for them both. She is a traitor to me and he is a traitor to you ; and when a Turk meets a Turk even a Toddy party must be turned into a tug-of-war. Be near her, love her, and marry her indeed ! Fiddlesticks ! I would as lief marry our neighbour, the grown old spinster Kookiai.

Ta-ta. I look on your sweet face and smile showers of affection.

Yours always to be,
ERACH.

From Shera to Erach : —

Meher Villa,
Grant Road,
27th Dec., 19—
10 A.M.

Dear Erach,

Yours to hand. I was charmed to get it. I have kept the enclosure. You want something in return and I do not wish to keep you waiting for it long.

Jamshedji Sheth, who makes believe he likes and loves me was here yesterday to give me proof of it. After about ten minutes' tirade, the Sheth Saheb would rise and wash. He went into the bath-room, but not before he had carefully hung his coat on to a peg in a corner where he thought it would be safe from prying eyes. I do not know what took possession of me. Perhaps it was my

good genius, perhaps bad genius, perhaps womanly instinct. Woman-like I was drawn to the coat. Before he could finish, the pockets of the coat were turned inside out, and the treasure which I enclose herein safely trod into my hands. A fine little billet-doux, you will say. It is fine and flavoury too ; for it explains and explodes the plot. Aren't we both lucky ? Is it not a windfall ? We could have lived a lifetime and not known it. I rely on you to return me the enclosure. If they want war, by all means let them have it. But I tell you I practically declared it yesterday. The field of the Toddy party will be a splendid arena for the opening contest. I want my Erach's hearty support ; I expect him to rally round my standard, hold my banner and give it. I am your lady-love ; and chevalier-like you must woo and win me. I have not yet let the old dame into the secret. She is so avaricious. She wants me to marry the other one's money. But there will be time enough to think of this.

Before closing, let me impress it on you, Erach, you must deserve before you desire to conquer me.

Yours still to win,

SHERA.

P.S.—When the Sheth came out of the bathroom, he looked white as a sheet and confused. He is a fine looking fellow ; isn't he ? And yet I do not like him—why, I cannot say, unless it be that it is fantasy. He looked as if he wanted to enquire about the billet-doux ; but he must have thought better of it. Certain it is that he looked fixedly into my face. He could read nothing there, as I had taken good care to settle it and was already deep down into a newspaper. Woman-like you will say. And yet I am not quite a woman—I mean a thorough-paced, hard, matter-of-fact one.

Hallo, what's this ? Letter from her Ladyship. You are very lucky, Erach. I was just closing this ; but now I have to take a

bigger envelope and to put on an extra stamp. I don't want you to be out of pocket even by a half-penny. Take care of this other enclosure also. Just look at their motto : Manashni, Ghavashni, Kunashni.[1] Cheek ! Simple cheek ! Impudence ! Egotism ! Is it not airing one's goodness ? I should not do it. I hate mottoes. Am I bad, because I do it ? If I am, it's not my fault. The blame should attach somewhere else—school education, home training, example and what not, if we could only look into it. Ha ! Ha ! Am I not philosophising ? Going to my future philosopher to be for light and leading ! Don't harangue or preach a homily, Erach, for I don't like them.

Hallo-o-o ! Ho ! Ho ! A third letter ! Guess from whom ; but you can't. It is from the Bara Bara Bai-Saheb—Jerbanooji, addressed to dear dear sister Meherbanooji, which she has very graciously passed on to me. " Jer " means goal, wealth, money : and " Meher " means mercy, kindness, gentleness all combined. A regular out-and-out *ulta-soolti*—rule of contrariety. For is not mother's name Meherbanoo ? She has no *meher* ; and the other one has no *jer*. There, there ! I shan't go on any longer. I must close.

Tut, tut, I am not going to reply to either of them.

The gum is so bad, so obstinate ; but stick it shall.

S.

From Thriti to Shera :—

Meher Villa,
Grant Road,
Dec. 25th, 19—

Dear Shera,

We are living in the same house and you would say I could have told you personally all I have said here. I thought of doing it, but could not. I think I must have it out in writing, if I don't want my feeling to suffocate me. Cousin, close as we are in age and blood, why can't we come closer still ? Why can't we unite in

[1] Good thoughts—Good words—Good deeds.

love, affection and goodwill? Why can't we all, though living apart, make it a happy family, God alone knows. We don't bear you and yours the least bit of ill-will. We are trying to persuade ourselves that on your side you feel the same. What is there then that breaks the blood link and disturbs the even flow of the great river of human milk? There, there, you will think I am mad. Perhaps I am for have not our troubles been great? I have tried to explain it, but feel that I have failed. Cousin dear come to my rescue. Think what there is that keeps us so apart. Think of the remedy. Consult my good uncle and aunt, consult Erach, consult Jamshed if you will; but for the sake of God, let the dividing curtain, the false guise that so mercilessly stands between us, fall once for all. Let us mix and meet often as sisters; for are we not so after all? Mother and Jal and even our good old ayah who has helped Ma to bring me up from birth upwards feel the same. We are moving from this house shortly and that perhaps has partly led me on to write this. Distance might perhaps be more favourable to this happy consummation. For the sake of us all let us hope so. We are to meet at Mrs. Mehelooji's Toddy party. In the purity of that pure white product let us sink our differences and seal the bonds of eternal friendship and love. Let it be peace, holy peace, for ever; for doth not our religion teach it? I hope and trust, cousin, you will not laugh at this simple outpouring of a simple heart. Give me proof of it when we meet. If proof be wanted from me, I am delighted to subscribe myself,

Your affectionate sister,

THRITI.

From Jerbanoo to Meherbanoo :—

Meher Villa,
Grant Road,
Dec. 25th, 19--

My dear Mehera,

I take my memory back over years and yet I can't find when I last wrote to you. Though so close, we meet so little, and talk still

less. We have never opened our hearts to each other. I go down on my knees to you, though you are younger, and ask your pardon for being so plain. The Almighty is my witness that I like and love you and bear you and yours no ill-will for anything that you may have said or done or may say or do hereafter. May I think you reciprocate the feeling? You have asked us to leave your house; and I don't complain. Our children have grown up together and yet are apart. I don't blame you for that even. The death of their dear father has not softened you somehow towards me or them; and yet we don't murmur. I do not write this to air our grievances, for you may think we have none. I write this only to appeal to you for I don't think you are hard. I persuade myself that this piteous pleading will not fall on deaf ears.

Mehera, I feel that my end is not far off. It is that perhaps that has led me on to pen this. My hand shakes, my fingers tremble and with these, my poor pen. My poor memory,—it is daily becoming poorer still. The grim hand of Death is doubtless on me. Its grip is merciless. It will torture its victim but will never let go its hold. I shudder when I think what will become of my children after I am gone. Their only possession is good birth and good education. Thank God, none can deprive them of these. And yet when I bethink me, they are so young—too young to take care of themselves. You will stand to them in the stead of a mother after I am gone. Promise me, sister dear, that you will do so. God has given you plenty and you have only two dear ones to provide for. My children are not ingrates; they will love you like a mother if you will only allow them. It is not I that am speaking to you in this wise, Mehera; it is a holier spirit, it is our saving genius, Sepentemenush.[1] I am only his mouthpiece. Sister dear, if you will only assure me in a few simple words, "thy children will be mine, I shall be a mother unto them, they

[1] Good genius, the spirit of all that is good and great in mankind according to Zoroaster.

will be my care, Jer," I shall die happy. Will you do this and relieve a poor mother of the pain of parting? I know you will; for did not the same mother, who bore me, bore you? If I tell you that your husband Ardeshir has been good to us all along, I shall mean no disparagement to you. It is but meet that I should make my humble acknowledgments of his goodness. You will show this letter to him; will you not? It is my earnest prayer that you do so. You will stand by my bedside and comfort me before I am gone; won't you? Let my eyelids close with the tender blessings of you all. As for my children, the Yezds and Amshaspends [1] will spread their wings round them and protect them through the long hours of the day and the long watches of the night. May God's and Zarthushtra's [2] great mercy environ you all. I cannot write more. And what more can I say beyond praying to God and our Prophet to enlighten you with the light of their great wisdom and to protect you all?

Your loving sister,

JER.

P.S.—Please excuse blots and scratches. My tears were falling fast the while my fingers were creeping over this.

[1] The holy spirits, according to Zoroaster thirty-three in all, who are supposed to rule over all the elements, seasons and important products in nature, and to exercise influence through them over us.

[2] The only prophet of the Parsis, styled Zoroaster by the Westerns.

CHAPTER VIII

MAI OR MAIJI ?

Day unto day her dainty hands
Make life's soil'd temples clean,
And there's a wake of glory where
Her spirit pure hath been.
At midnight through that shadow land
Her living face doth gleam,
The dying kiss her shadow,
The dead smile in their dream.''

GERALD MASSEY.

"MAGDALENE,—Mai,—so you have come ? " exclaimed Thriti's mother Jerbanoo, joyfully accosting in Gujarati a comely Scottish damsel who had that minute crossed her threshold and had run into her outstretched arms in the right Parsi fashion.

Who this damsel was and where she hailed from, the reader will glean from the next chapter. As to her appearance, the word "comely" is so comprehensive. Imagine to yourself then a fine young Christian lady, handsome, graceful and well proportioned with frank and open Scottish features and forehead, long and glossy hair, but less the bloom and the glow, the tint and hue of the Highland hills. Our enervating eastern clime is so inimical to these. Years hence people will sing about her in unison with South, "she that is comely when old and decrepit, surely was very beautiful when she was young." She was dressed *cap-a-pie* in Parsi fashion. If anything, it added charm to beauty, grace to gracefulness and aptness to attraction.

But what about the word Mai ?

To the Indian reader, who is so familiar with the word, it will appeal as usual in a variety of ways,—appeal to his feeling for his

mother, appeal to his love, appeal to the milk of human kindness, appeal to his affections, appeal to his sense of mercy, appeal to his indulgence and nobility of heart, appeal to everything that is good and great in him. I should however be lacking in my sense of obligation to the English and foreign reader, were I to desist from bringing home to him the import, meaning and mightiness of the word Mai. Would he be surprised then if I told him that the word Mai, which means with him plain and simple mater or mother, means with us a world of affection, a mint of charm and mountainous heights of love, duty and endearance? The fine Miss Adelaide, Miss Georgiana, and Miss Franklin, at your English and foreign home use the word mother when addressing their maternal parent, their mothers-in-law and their godmothers. Here in these parts, miles upon miles away, we are as you call us more clannish, more closely drawn towards one another in the bonds of family ties and family interests, than you, graceful ladies and gents, across the seas. Western education and western civilization and enlightenment may have touched us in many ways, likely for good, likely for evil ; but they have never succeeded in shaking the virtue of the word Mai or in breaking or disturbing our everlasting faith in its efficacy. Call us *jungli* [1] if you will ; but here a mother calls a daughter Mai, an elder sister applies that term to her younger one, a babe is termed 'mother' by its own mother and grandmother, a maidservant calls her baisaheb or mem 'mother' and *vice versa*. Aye! Aye! You turn up your nose, arch your eyebrows and curl your lips. Your whole frame and features express doubt ; but all the same it is gospel. The magic words *Mahri Mai Karu* (I will make you my mother) and *Mai Mahri* (mother mine) in nine cases out of ten make a disobedient servant subservient, a fractious child drink its medicine, a disorderly young daughter or sister do her elders' behests, run

[1] Barbarian.

their errands, carry their messages, clean their utensils and wash their clothes.

The word Bap or Bava, which plain and simple means "father," has the same magical effect when used in connection with the harder sex. The virtue or efficacy of these cannot be too fully described or magnified. It is the great link of love and affection which binds old and young, rich and poor, male and female, in one homogenous whole. It is a river running with the milk of human kindness, in which old and young, rich and poor, good and bad, honest and dishonest, are at liberty to wash and clean and purge themselves of many vices. With the Hindus the word "mother" also has a religious significance and veneration. They call even the *gai* or cow, "mother"; because they hold that by the virtue of her life-giving elixir the cow is a sort of godmother to the child, who is the father of the man, and therefore entitled to all the rank, reverence and privilege of a mother.

Mother's love is the cream of love,
Mother's truth keeps constant youth.

CHAPTER IX

THE MACGREGORS

" The good are better made by ill,
As odours crushed are better still."

MISS Macgregor, or Magdalene as we will continue to call her, was the daughter of John Macgregor, a Scottish gentleman of fallen fortune, who had come over to India some years ago as a junior assistant in a Scottish indenting firm where Jerbanoo's husband Feroze Patel filled an important situation. His brother Joseph Macgregor was senior assistant to the same firm. In course of time the old masters were gathered to their ancestors and interred in the English cemetery at Sewri with epitaphs suitable to their station in Anglo-Indian society. Feroze Patel and the Scottish brothers then went into partnership. As ill-luck would have it Feroze died untimely and rheumatics and gout confined John Macgregor to a permanent sick-bed. The worthy brothers' ability was very mediocre. It went no further than piecegoods and parcels. They were very modest and very thrifty, lived a simple godly life, and avoided hard drink, tobacco and heavy meals. The father and daughter, therefore, often wondered who could have introduced the former to gout and rheumatics. The more keen-witted Mr. Joseph put it down and perhaps rightly, to the credit of their grandfather who was known to have been a hard eater and drinker.

Magdalene was John Macgregor's only child. John had the misfortune to bury his better half in an early grave in Scotland after Magdalene had seen the light of the world for only a year. They said she was an angel. Joseph maintained this also and urged that God had called her to her right place in heaven even at the

expense of John and his daughter, who traced all their misfortune to that never-to-be-forgotten event. Magdalene was her mother's prototype. She had inherited her form and beauty but as misfortune never comes single when she was only ten, she had a serious fall when sliding down the staircase rail in company with her boy cousin. This left a scar on her forehead and effected a permanent injury in her right leg which all the available skill in Scotland could not cure. The girl acquired a slight limp which the doctors said would disappear with age. But doctors are rarely right. She was now full four and twenty and the limp had become chronic long before. It was this event that dispirited and dejected her and disinclined her to marry. Her father's permanent illness added fuel to the fire. Her fine voice and talents enabled her to give lessons in English and music which secured her a modest personal competence.

Since coming out to India, she had acquired a thorough knowledge of French and Urdu, besides Gujarati, which last Thriti had taught her. John Macgregor and the house were Magdalene's care. Uncle Joseph kept the tottering old office on its legs. In the company of Jerbanoo and Thriti, Magdalene visited Parsi homes and had seen a great deal of Parsi men and manners—so much so that she had become almost a Parsi except in the matter of her faith. After Feroze's death she was more at Jerbanoo's than ever. She had a fondness for Parsi costume. The *sari* sat so well on her and effectually concealed the limp. She could have concealed the scar if she wore her hat low ; but she disdained to do it. She urged that any one wishing to marry her must do so with the full knowledge of her defects.

It is this angel in the shape of a Scottish damsel, this beautiful bit of humanity, whom we see Jerbanoo accosting so familiarly at the opening of the last chapter.

CHAPTER X

THE SCOTTISH MAIDEN SPEAKS OUT

"MAGDALENE,—Mai,—so you have come?" we have heard Thriti's mother exclaiming.

"Yes, Maiji, I have come. How could you think otherwise? Am I not with you almost daily? Are you not my Maiji? Is not Thriti my sister and is not Jal my brother? O Maiji, Maiji, at times I wish we could all go and live together on the heights of my native land with none but ourselves to think of." She then embraced Jerbanoo with fresh fervour.

"Magdalene, it is a long time, my dear, I have not been to see your good father and uncle" said Jerbanoo plaintively. "You see these troubles of ours naturally tell more on me than on the children. God keep troubles from them. Of late I have been feeling very weak. At times my legs refuse to carry me and I feel careworn and wearied. I think my days are numbered. I have evil forebodings and evil dreams and I am always in horror of something bad happening to us. Thriti's future troubles me more than Jal's. Jal is a boy and can fight his own way in life. Oh! If I could only live till he is able to do so and Thriti properly settled in life!

"Magdalene, Mai, wise as you are, don't you think you could set Thriti an example? You have rejected more than one good offer. Thriti is already betrothed; and yet, O dear! I do not know how it will all end. If only Erach and she could come together as Feroze and I did! You cannot think how loving we were!—outwardly two different souls, inwardly but one."

"Maiji," responded Magdalene very gently, "I have rejected more than one offer of marriage, for I did not think I could have

done well by any of them. It seemed to me that it could be nothing but a mere passing whim or fantasy on the part of those who could venture to go in for a girl with a scar and a limp. Thriti, Maiji, has a husband ready at hand. But would to God she lived to become an old spinster than marry Erach who has no wish apparently to marry her. The girl, who has vowed to die single, if she happen at all to marry, secures a better husband than she, who has been hankering after marriage and launches headlong into the matrimonial mart. In Thriti's case, the unwilling husband is thrown into her way—I may say practically thrust into her arms—be she willing to take him or not. Oh, Maiji, if they must marry, for God's sake do not hurry them. There is something in Erach, in his looks and in his behaviour which cannot but repel any well-minded girl from him. His presence creates a sort of repugnance in me, though like a good Christian I try to discourage that sort of feeling. We Scotch have a reputation for superstition. Our ancestors had their time-honoured prejudices which I have inherited; and I am not afraid to say that if I were you, Maiji, I would never allow Thriti to marry Erach. In the old old days, Maiji, there were instances of Scottish fathers slaying their children to save them from unhappy ends or from falling into the hands of evil-doers. I would rather see Thriti slain thrice over than that she should get into the clutches of Erach."

"But, Magdalene, if I break off the match and if God be pleased to call me to His presence, what would then become of Thriti? Who would look after her? Who would maintain her?"

"Look at me, Maiji. Look at me. Your words go to my heart. They would discourage me were I to allow them to do so; but I will not. God forbid, but if He were to take Uncle Joseph from us, where would then we be? Why, I would give ten years of my life if but to add only two to his. But if the Lord be determined to take him, why, what then? Is not his kith and kin, his kinswoman, his brothers noble birth—the Scottish Magdalene—

ready to support and soothe and console old John Macgregor's closing days ? Look at that picture which Mr. Feroze so much liked. The verses below have often been explained to you, Maiji. In the words of that maiden, supporting her disconsolate and discomfited hero on her breast, I would encourage my father by saying :—

"Come, rest on this bosom, my own stricken deer,
Though the herd have forsaken thee thy home is still here ;
Here still is the smile that no cloud could overcast,
And a heart and a hand all thine own to the last.
Thou hast called me thy angel in moments of bliss,
And thy angel I'll be midst the horrors of these,
Through the furnace unshrinking thy steps to pursue
And shield thee and save thee or die with thee too."

Magdalene stretched herself to her full height and a strange glow pervaded her beautiful countenance.

"Thriti is not a blockhead, Maiji," she burst out, "she can live by her wits and brains as I do. She can nurse and nourish and buy nourishment for herself. Though a girl, she must be trained to be a man, aye, a warrior. Remember, the blue blood of Iran runs in her veins. Aye, aye, mother mine, how could you forget that. I shall be her chaperon, her friend, philosopher and guide. She will fight her battles under my banner. Our standard will bear the motto :—Modesty, Integrity and Industry. I shall take her out with me, introduce her to my friends and patrons, aye, if needs be resign some of my tuitions to her. Relieve your mind therefore of all these groundless fears which are but the creatures of fancy. You tell me, Maiji, you are nervous about this Toddy party; you are afraid of Erach and Jamshed falling foul of each other and creating a scene. Ah ! Mammaji, this is another of fancy's fretful works ! But as you wish it, I shall certainly accompany the

children to the party. Will you not give me a good motherly kiss and your motherly blessings when like the conquering hero coming I deliver them triumphantly to your loving arms ?"

She then turned to the cottage piano close by, struck the keys which obediently lent themselves to her masterly touch, and sang the song of the Troubadour, in sweet and silvery accents that thrilled through the very air.

SONG.

Gaily the Troubadour
Touched his guitar
As he was hastening
Home from the war.

Singing from Palestine
Hither I come
Lady Love ! Lady Love !
Welcome me home.

She for the Troubadour
Hopelessly wept
Sadly she thought of him
When others slept.

Singing in search of thee
Would I might roam
Troubadour ! Troubadour !
Come to thy home.

Hark ! was the Troubadour
Breathing her name
Under the battlement
Softly he came.

Singing in search of thee
Hither I come

Lady Love ! Lady Love !
Welcome me home.

Jal and Thriti, who had entered the room when the music began, stood aside spell bound. The close of the song witnessed Thriti locked firm in Magdalene's embrace.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAN IN THE BATHROOM

"*Such duty as the subject owes the prince,*
Even such a woman oweth to her husband,
And when she's froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel,
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace,
Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey."

SHAKESPEARE'S *Taming of the Shrew.*

DISTRUST, they say, is born of Ahenghrimenush [1]; and trust, we are told, is begotten of Sepentemenush. In worldly war, however, experience has taught us that the former is more victorious. Some there are who are so ingenuous that they care not for caution and would trust even a tiger; others there are who value caution so much that it becomes their fetish. They would rather lose their game than trust blindfold to win it. There is no distrust so demeaning and so disdainful as that between parent and child. This distrust may exist even where the two are apparently most affectionate and loving. Meherbanoo's elder daughter was her pet. The pet loved her mother as much as it was in her nature to do so. And yet, sooth to say, the mother distrusted the daughter and the daughter distrusted the mother. The daughter ruled the mother with an iron hand. Her terrorism over her female parent was only greater in proportion to that which that worthy exercised over her

[1] The same as Ahriman, the spirit of evil that is according to Zoroaster waging constant war against Sepentemenush.

mate. When the girl's temper was roused, she called her mother Meherbai or Meherbanoo. On the present occasion it was the same.

"A word with you, Meherbai," and without waiting for a reply and followed by her mother like a lamb, the daughter led the way into an inner apartment. This apartment adjoined a capacious bathroom. The door of this bathroom usually stood closed. There were two Venetian windows with the shutters drawn close. Any one who cared to look through the chinks of the shutters could see everything in the room. Under ordinary circumstances the mother and daughter would have stopped to see if the bathroom was empty. But just at this moment they were so taken up with their own thoughts and so excited that it did not occur to them to do so. If they had, they could have seen that the room was not unoccupied. Sharebroker Ardeshir, who came in and went out at all hours of the day and who had come in a few minutes before, was preparing to have a dive into his bath-tub, when he stood spell-bound at the sound of his wife and daughter's voices which were heard in high altercation. To listen or not to listen was now the question. To show himself and not to listen would, he thought, be injudicious. Who knows what may come of it? He approached the door gently, put on an extra bolt or two, and then feeling somewhat reassured prepared to listen.

"Meherbai,"—the daughter's voice it was that first rose high into the air,—"Meherbanoo," she repeated, stamping her foot on the floor with considerable vehemence. "No more trifling with me; I tell you, you must do it."

Meherbanoo looked or appeared to look doubtful of her daughter's intention, at which the latter became more enraged and struck her fist against the bathroom door so forcibly that it would certainly have flown open had it not been carefully bolted from within. The self-made prisoner sent up a sigh of thanksgiving to Hormuzd for His great mercy. He shuddered to think what would have been his plight had he been caught eaves-drooping red-handed.

"Don't look so dubious. Don't pretend you understand me not," literally shrieked the girl. "Whoever thought of calling you Meherbanoo! 'Meher' means mercy; and you are so merciless. 'Banoo' means 'lady';—have you ever behaved like a lady? There, there, don't interrupt; let me finish. You will free me from this unnatural bondage, if I am to call you mother. He does not like me; and really and truly I have never liked him. It was your avarice, your lust for gold, that bound me to that man." Her hatred for Jamshed was steadily growing, so much so that she would not even call him by his name.

Taking advantage of this little break in the storm, Meherbanoo ventured to put in a word.

"*Dikri mahari* (daughter mine), it was neither avarice nor lust for gold that did it; it was my deceased brother's death-bed injunctions,—which your father that is and I have vowed to uphold."

"Hush—Hush, Meherbai! Don't try to be a saint. I was but a child when you tied me down to that scapegrace. Why, I could not even realize the gravity of the thing. I will not give my hand where my heart refuses to go. You did it with that man; and look at the result. A fig for your *bhanvana-ganvana* [1]! There, there, hear your Mobed [2] chanting in that room so vociferously, as if God is deaf! What use are these Zoroastrian prayers in this house, wherein you are killing your daughter by inches?"

"But, my dear girl," put in the mother—

"Don't dear me and don't call me girl;—I am no more a girl than you are."

"Well then—Sherbanoo,—if you will have it so,—these scenes are becoming detestable. It is time we end them. Plain and simple, you ask that the match be broken off. May I know if you have weighed the consequences? I see you have not. Then let

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[1] Prayers and observances. [2] A Parsi priest.

me tell you that Jamshed will be jolly glad to be rid of you and will straight off marry your cousin."

"*Ji ha*, Baisaheb (to be sure, Madam), and I shall straight away marry him who will be jolly glad to be rid of that other cousin of his."

"Yes ; and will not that remind us of the old story of the frog and the log ?" asked the mother. "Erach is not Jamshed. Jamshed will make you happy even under the most discouraging circumstances. He is his father's son and every inch of him is honourable. Erach's father was not half so honourable; and talking of education what is Erach before Jamshed ? Why," rattled on the dame, "if I were you I would take it as a singular stroke of good fortune to be in a position to link my fate with Jamshed's."

"A truce to your homilies, Meherbai. It is too late to think of all this. If you were as wise at my age, you would not have married that humdrum who must now be splitting hair with his brother brokers in the Share Bazaar. They are all humming there from morn till eve like buzzing bees and extracting the life-blood from the veins of those who rely on them."

The humdrum parent within sent up thanksgiving that he was not in the Share Bazaar at the time.

"Shera, Shera ; is that how you want to avenge yourself on Jamshed ? Though I shall not take the responsibility of breaking off the match, believe me, I will not thwart you in your intentions. A word from you and the thing is done. Only instead of avenging you will be doing them capital service, for which Jamshed might give you a life-long pension. Revenge is so sweet ;—is it not? Give up Jamshed if you will, but don't do it until you have had that sweet thing."

The prisoner within struck his fist against his forehead and moved about most uneasily in the uncomfortable corner in which he was ensconced.

"Meherbanoo, you are right—quite right. Revenge is sweet, especially when recommended by a mother;—is it not? And if I could have it, and also my freedom, I should certainly—"

"—Thank me," finished the mother. "There, I knew you would come round. One good turn deserves another, Shera. You must assist me in having my revenge on that detestable sister of mine and her daughter. I hate them for their very virtues, and so do you. Don't you? The object of one's hate need not be hateful in itself. What right, what right have the poor to be virtuous? Why, their very misery constitutes their happiness. The boy has inherited his father's brains and virtues; and as for the girl,—why,—"

"Say it out, mother, you have told it me so many times,—you almost wish this Thriti was born to you."

"I for one pray to Heaven it were so," muttered the male parent within.

Seeing the rising ire of the girl the older woman made another and a shrewder move. "Well, well, Shera, we do so many things in spite of ourselves—only because the wish is father of the thought. Is not this sister of mine proud as Lucifer? Why, Edal Ahoo, the richest *daroovala*[1] in Bombay, told me the other day, he offered to lay his all in this world at her feet, if she—this wretched widow in that black patch of hers—would only consent to have him. Why, the man is practically rolling in riches; and what more, he has the police of Bombay under his thumb. He is said to have drawn murderers from the gallows. Dossu Duggans, who has lakhs and lakhs,—"

"—The gambler, you mean," interrogated the girl. "Why, would you have married him if you were a widow?"

"Gambler or no gambler, only look at the mint the man has. He took his chance with others; and while others lost he won."

"But he may have played tricks."

"Gambling, girl, like love and war, admits of all kinds of tricks. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred have to resort to tricks before

[1] A dealer in strong drinks and wines.

they become golden bricks. All the same, child, it's three generations make a gentleman. Why, look at the present ultra-civilized Christian contest. What is the 'World against Germany' war but a game of chance? Civilization and the best of modern inventions are but the merciless tools of slaughter. But, I was saying, girl, your auntie had the check to refuse even this Dossu Duggans."

"You are prevaricating, mother, you are so sly. Didn't I ask you if you would marry this Dossu Duggans?"

"Not as a damsel; but certainly yes, as a widow."

The prisoner within was here known to mutter unheard execrations. The only words that fell audibly and died away in the closeness of the bathroom were: 'The woman is mad. What is a disaffected, unloving, disloyal wife, but a widow with a living husband? She has all the freedom and privileges of a widow."

"Meherbanoo, you are wasting time," said the girl. "What is it to me if the widow remarry or not? You were telling me you were as anxious to be avenged on this precious sister of yours and her children as I on Jamshed. But you don't tell me why you dislike Erach so much. Is this the thanks you give me for taking sides with you against Ardeshir? Beware, Meherbanoo, do anything so long as you don't let your feelings against Erach change into hatred for him. Remember, though poor he is your brother's son."

"Shera, Shera," replied the mother, "be he what he may, I shall like him for your sake. My word on it."

A little bird whispered into the ear of the man in the bathroom that he was in a predicament. The plot was thickening and any moment the women-folk might wish to make sure that they were unobserved and unheard. Many a lesson of this kind he had from his wife; and the principal of them was caution. He gently removed the bolts from their sockets and without further thought jumped into a dirty clothes-basket. He was not a moment too quick; for just then the door was thrown open and the elder woman

assured herself that nobody was in.

" My experience is yet greater than thine," said the wily wife, the graceless sister and the unmotherly mother. " The very walls have ears, girl; I have my doubts and I shall say my say in an undertone."

To the great chagrin of the living contents of the dirty-clothes basket, who pricked up his ears, out there the women continued to speak low. They were apparently pleased now with each other; for just when they were leaving the room, there was a satisfied ejaculation from the girl: " Alright, Meherbanoo, I think this plan of yours is bound to succeed."

Their departure was a sign for the man in the bathroom to come out of his hiding; but he was cautious and did not do so until the coast was quite clear.

The worst of men, why, the commonest of them, even the veriest villager, the same as the best of them, is at times a bit of a philosopher. Coming out of the closed atmosphere of the bathroom, Ardeshir's brains had cleared and went off on a ruminating journey thus:—" Educationists, essayists and moralists have maintained that good home and college training is a sure guarantee of small children growing into good men and good women. On the other hand, there are not a few who urge that children take after their parents, that good parents have good children and bad parents have bad ones. Some even go further and say, if A's son B is bad, B's son C is worse and C's son D is the worst of all. At the same time we have experience of robbers' sons turning out gentlemen and gentlemen's sons turning out robbers. Honest parents have dishonest children and *vice versa*. We have read of murderers having angels of daughters and of angelic mothers having daughters that have disgraced the very name of woman. On the other side there is nature to make our mental confusion worse confounded. The dullest of parents have produced the most intelligent of progeny and the most learned men are known to have an idiotic race."

My case, thought the philosopher, is curious still. I am good, I suppose, in my own way, and that woman there,—I mean my wife—is a vixen. We have one little daughter, that is an angel ; and a grown up one, that is—well, why not—a Satan. Has nature done this on purpose to bless and blast alike ? Or is it only one of her formidable freaks ? But, oh, what if both the girls were alike. Not angels for it would then have been a heaven on earth—but Satans. The three Satans combined would have made but mummy of poor me. The idea is torture. I am so hungry. I must first go out at the back door and come in at the front one to show that I have just returned.

So much, reader, for this little family world and its wisdom.

CHAPTER XII

HE AND SHE

" My wife, my life! O we will walk this world,
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so thro' those dark gates across the wild
That no man knows. Indeed I love thee; come,
Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me."

TENNYSON'S *Princess.*

MR. and Mrs. Mehelooji, who were on the seamy side of fifty, belonged to the old and orthodox school of humanitarians. Having no children of their own, they doted on those of others. Toddy farms formed their principal source of revenue. Having plenty of money they were at a loss to know how to spend it. By way of solution they distributed small bounties amongst the poor and needy all round. They owned a bungalow with a large compound, in the district of Bombay known as Parel, where they occasionally gave expensive Toddy parties. Those were no half-hearted parties. There feasting and merriment always found full play. When Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji entertained, they did it right royally. The word " entertainment " seemed to be stamped on their broad foreheads. Invitation notes did not find favour with them. They must go and invite people personally. That, they said, always impressed their guests with the sincerity of their good wishes. The hosts' motors were an additional temptation. Two of them went in twenty different directions and brought the guests all within two hours for a full evening's gathering.

As yet the reader has only a slight insight into the character of Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji. We will look into it more anon. For they are people worth knowing intimately.

CHAPTER XIII

OUR TODDY

" Toddy can the purest joy impart,
Toddy inspires the saddest heart,
Toddy gives cowards valour's rage,
Toddy gives youth to tottering age."

THE European reader whose eye may catch these pages, though domiciled in India for long, may still be unacquainted with the worth and value of Toddy, much more with that of Toddy parties. For, whatever the good qualities of Toddy, it has never found favour with men of the West nor displaced their favourite Carlton and Cognac. " What is Toddy?" I imagine the English reader asking. It is the juice of *tad*, cocoanut and *khajuri* or date trees. It is white and pure as mother's milk. It is a health-giving elixir. It restores and invigorates when taken pure and in moderate quantities. Large doses do certainly intoxicate ; but even the intoxication is said to work its own good.

The restrictions and taxation on Toddy are so heavy that it is difficult to find it unadulterated. Toddy farmers have large fields overgrown with Toddy trees. The *chhejvawallas* or drawers climb up the trees with the help of leather waist-bands, and collect the juice into vessels tied up at their waists from *mutkas* or earthen pots into which it has streamed overnight through wounds made by sharp iron instruments into the topmost part of the tree. The Toddy parties are open-air ones. The clusters of tree and the shade of the scanty leaves form the only shelter. When the sun is preparing to go down and the heat of his burning rays has slackened, the guests may be seen either strolling pleasantly or reclining or stretch-

ing themselves at full length on carpets and ottomans, with supporting pillows, spread out on the ground in the right Oriental fashion. The food which consists of roasted fowl, spiced meat, and *kababs* or meat-balls, is being done over a sparkling fire in one place, whilst a species of vegetable known as *papri* is being prepared over a stove in another place to form the tasty dish known as *oobaria*. The Toddy is being drawn under the very eyes of the guests to assure them of its freshness. It is drunk direct from the earthen pots by means of a green leaf which forms the connecting link between the lip and the rim of the pot.

The hosts here could not be said to do the honours of the table, as there are no tables and but a few tumblers, dishes and plates. But the honours of the broadcloth they do with an earnestness, zeal and regularity, worthy of the knights and barons of old. Tea, coffee and soda, and even brandy and whisky, are an additional allurement. The hardened drinker, who may find Toddy too mild for his purpose, mix it with brandy on the pretext of preventing chills and cold, which he says are inherent in the Toddy. The spirits of the guests rise in proportion to the coolness of the air, and the strength and freshness of the copious doses they may quaff. Reserve gives way to freedom, tongues which only a few minutes before refused to move begin to wag. Faces glow, as the exhilarating elixir goes down their throat or the roasted meat and fowl on the plaintain leaves—which serve as plates—find their way to the stomach. Even the most punctilious and the most reserved treat the occasion as an exception.

Toddy exposed to the rays of the sun becomes strong. It is drunk by hard drinkers. The mild drinkers favour fresh-drawn or mild Toddy. Toddy parties of the rowdies not infrequently end in rowdyism. They are like the drinking bouts of the West.

CHAPTER XIV

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE

"*Methinks,*
Some unborn sorrow, ripe in fortune's womb
Is coming towards me, and my inward soul
With nothing trembles."

SHAKESPEARE'S *Richard II.*

TWO figures, one a male and another a female, brightened the gateway of "Happy Home" on that memorable Toddy party day, which also beheld the fiftieth birthday of the worthy mistress of the house. Our old friend, the novelist, would have had it, "darkened the gateway." I have purposely abstained from this, for the reason that the figures were those of Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji. Though not young, they were certainly bright. They disliked sable and never attired in black. They were a well-built pair and retained the vigour and freshness of youth even with the advance of age. They were both cousins and came of poor parentage. Mehelooji's father, though illiterate, had amassed money by honourable means. Education was unknown in his days; and yet when the ball of it was set a-rolling by the benign British Government, the illiterate father never waited to consider but put his son to school at once and would not rest until the son was fairly well educated.

Strange to say, that while the literate Parsi of the present day looks to mental training only, the illiterate Parsi of the olden times made physical and mental training go together nay, he even went so far as to think that there could be no mental training without bodily care. The father was a chip of the old block and Mehelooji developed into a sort of a link between the old and the new gene-

rations. He was an athlete, a wrestler, and a boxer to boot. The old *talimkhana* or gymnasium stood him in the stead of a club. He often surprised his juvenile companions by making one of them stand over his head and two over his shoulders at the same time, without flinching. At times he would allow one to hang on to him by both hands over his chest and another over his back, and yet walk erect with the full brunt of the burden. Head downwards he would support a full-sized man on the soles of his uplifted feet. In spite of all this, he was simple, good-natured, respectable and generous, to an extreme. He married his cousin, Chandan, without a *sou*, when she was only fifteen and he eighteen. Though full fifty now, Chandan's face had made no friendship with furrows or freckles, and she had all the recommendations of a comely damsel of five and twenty.

Mehelooji was invariably clad in white and wore the china silk Parsi *pughdee* or turban. Chandan liked and wore modest white, pale, red blue or green *saris* and borders of variegated shades and colours with *badyans* or blouses to match. A snow-white *sudreh* [1] and a white *mathabana* [2] were not unsuited to her attractions. Men and women of this type and temperament are not many amongst us now.

As if in keeping with the character of this enviable couple, a small marble *takhti* or tablet with the words "Happy Home" was embedded in a corner of the large gateway. Overhead stood a glass plate with the word Welcome marked on it in golden letters. Penetrating further into the compound, there was an archway with the words God Bless You. Further on, another archway denoted the words Trust in God and Be Not Daunted. Still further on, the words Remember Us As We Remember You attracted our notice. The old-type orthodox Parsi like the Roman Catholic had a

[1] A white muslin garment, forming one of the two emblems or outward symbols of Zoroastrianism, *viz.*, *sudreh* and *kushti*.

[2] A soft muslin head-patcher band.

devout liking for and a sort of a religious faith in the efficacy and virtue of words and phrases. They were to be seen, painted or pasted on cardboard or worked in canvas or velvet, and hung up in frames over doorways and in sitting-rooms and verandahs. *Extempore* arches of bamboo frames and green leaves, with hanging oil-*butties*[1] and wooden lamp-posts, stretched out in lengths adorned the compound. A Kitson light globe graced the gateway. But to return to our story.

"Dame mine, Chandan," spoke Mehelooji, gently touching his better-half under the chin to draw her attention, "why art thou so pensive to-day? What ails thee? Come, Chandan, tell me, why art thou so down-hearted?" And he carried her hand to his throat, which meant, swear by me and tell me the truth.

Without any demur the good wife replied: "You are right, Mehelooji; when were you not? And have not I always felt comforted unbosoming myself to you? Meheloo dear, I had a presentiment, call it a dream if you will, as bad as bad could be. I shudder to think of it." And Mehelooji did notice a shiver passing through her frame that same moment.

"Pooh-pooh!" he said. "You women-folk are always having dreams and presentiments, when you are not emptying your husband's purse or extracting a *sari*, a *badyan* or a nice little slipper from him. Don't be angry, Dame; thou art an angel; I don't include thee amongst them. But come, out with your dream. I trow, thou hadst an overfeed of fowl overnight."

"Mehelooji," said the worthy dame, "I dreamt, you and I and a company of friends were travelling in a train and just as the train was passing through a tunnel a big big rock rolled down from over the top of the hill and—and—Oh, I cannot conclude—You have ere long heard what havoc these rolling stones from the carved hill-tops wreak."

[1] An *extempore* lamp, consisting of a small common glass tumbler, burning a cotton wick in cocoanut oil.

"Is that all, Chandan? Only think, how lucky we are that we have escaped that terrible accident scot free and are standing here safe and sound to welcome our guests. Come, come, repeat thou our prayer Yatha and Ashem, as thou doest before going to bed and thank the Lord for His great mercy. Why when he does want us, we can't tarry here a minute. It is only that His mandate meets us in different forms; but the end is always the same. See, there's the motor coming as fast as fast could be. I have more than once paid heavily for that fellow's rashness and I will stand it no longer. It's a queer magnetism, this motor-driving sets up in one. The touch of the gear is enough to set the devil run right through you. Your head runs riot and you run the motor amuck among the multitude heedless of all consequences. I often wish I would go back to our old and modest mode of traction, at least until our roads are widened and separate motor-tracks are set up; but I doubt if we will live to see that day."

The next moment the motor rushed up to the door and two female forms dropped out of it, followed by a male. The female forms were those of Meherbanoo and her daughter Sherbanoo. The male form—but why? The two ladies the moment they came out of the car did not give themselves any rest but exclaimed almost in one breath: "We picked Erach up at Victoria Gardens; he was changing tram-car and it was all we could do to make him go in with us."

Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji, who were the very pink of politeness, showed no sign of surprise but merely contented themselves with observing that it was the most ordinary thing that could have occurred and that Erach was bound to chaperon the ladies.

Another motor drove up at that very instant, bringing two light burdens and a third and a rather heavy one. The light burdens were Magdalene and Thriti; the heavy one was Jamshed Aga. It was little short of a bomb bursting under the feet of the first

arrivals, who stood as if fixed to the spot. Magdalene, keen and cute as she was, grasped the situation in a moment, rose equal to the occasion and came to the rescue of her companions. Her explanation was as truthful as that of the mother and daughter was not. When the motor arrived at Victoria Gardens it had to come to a dead stop. A hack victoria horse that had a sunstroke lay flat on the roadway. Just at that minute they espied Jamshed, who looking at the frightened faces of the ladies, offered to go with them which offer was accepted.

The foregoing events occurred in much less time than it has taken for me to describe but it was not to stop there. A taxi drove up at that minute, ushering out in dignified array, a familiar trio. It was Ardeshir, his little daughter Roshan and her little cousin Jal. Little Roshan whom you could no longer call little looking to her figure, had put on a light *sari*, which her father had bought for her next birthday but which Jal insisted with the senior man's acquiescence on his wifie putting on to-day in honour of the occasion. Ardeshir was not for offering any explanation but his wife's and his elder daughter's uplifted eyebrows and burning eyes forced him to give one. Roshan, it seemed, was under orders to keep to her apartment that day. She was guilty, it appeared of some little breach of rule the previous day. Ardeshir bethought himself that the strictest rules were relaxed on unusual occasions ;—he, therefore, considered himself justified in giving precedence to the "Female Emancipation Bill" over the "Home Rule Bill" on this special occasion. Roshan's fears gave way at the sight of Jal. The young hearts were brimful of bliss in each other's company and at the idea of the coming excitement.

Meherbanoo and Shera looked daggers at Ardeshir and the two little ones. Ardeshir, however, took shelter in shaking hands all round, in offering congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji, and in talking of the beautiful day and of the pleasant taxi ride he and

the children just had. And what did the children do ? They commenced pulling and tugging at Magdalene and Thriti to take them in and appease their hunger which the motor ride had wonderfully braced up. And what about the rivals—Erach and Jamshed ? They glared and stared ; stared and glared ; and were fit to fly at each other. Then thinking better of it, they removed their eyes from each other and turned away. It was a tableau for the pen of a playwright or the brush of a painter. But none was by. By way of a small make-up, Mehelooji had a photographer ready to take groups.

Why wasn't the party moving in, enquired Ardeshir. He was answered by the arrival of a hack victoria with its quixotic burden. The passengers were a Mahomedan female singer, known as a *Kanchani* or *Nautchnari* [1] in gay attire, a Mahomedan *Sarangeewalla* [2] and a Mahomedan *Tabalchi*.[3] Seated a-top on the coach-box was a figure in ludicrous raiment, who looked much like a circus clown or a court jester. He had a *Raj-Dand* [4] in his hand and a bugle in his mouth, which he blew vociferously as the procession approached the doorway. There was not one but looked and laughed. Even the austere brows of Meherbanoo and the stern features of Sherbanoo relaxed and their scorching lips assumed smiles.

" Why, mercy on us ! Who could this be ? " they all ejaculated as if in one breath. Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji were the only two whose looks did not express surprise. It was Chandan's only brother Rustom.

" Why, bless me," exclaimed Chandan, " it's Rusi, Mehelooji."

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[1] Dancer.

[2] A player on an Indian stringed musical instrument, known as "*sarrangee.*"

[3] A native drum player.

[4] Staff of authority.

But Mehelooji's wits had gone a wool-gathering. He was a sober man of a religious turn of mind, a plain liver and a plain thinker. He did not like and never patronized these Mahomedan female singers who are the wreck and ruin of many a young man of fame and fortune. Rusi was his pet and he looked upon him as his own son. He never denied him anything. Had Rusi brought in a *gavaiya* [1] Mehelooji would have had nothing to say but he never could brook the idea of a *kanchani* within his compound.

Rustom saw the clouds that were gathered on the good man's looks. Clown-like he approached on the light fantastic toe and bowing and courtesying and placing the *Raj-Dand* at Mehelooji's feet and kissing the toes of his boots, he observed, " my obeisance to your Royal Majesty " ; then turning to Chandan, he continued, " and also to my liege lady—my gracious queen."

" Let Sire Mehelooji to the gods resign,
To reason yield, the empire over his mind ;
By the great God this command is given,
The singer and the player are the care of Heaven."

" I have brought the court singer at your bidding, Sire,—the famous Motidana ; and she is awaiting your royal commands."

Then without waiting for a reply he approached Magdalene : " Miss Macgregor, your champion, your adorer, your admirer, your chevalier. My devotion and duty to you for ever and aye ! My sword at your service ! My heart always in my mouth for you ! My hand is yours when you deign to demand it ! " Then turning to the other ladies he observed, " Your slave ! At your service, mesdames ! "

He then accomplished a quick flourish on his toe, cut capers like a monkey, and looking Erach and Jamshed in the face let his lower lip and jaw fall along with these words which fell from his mouth :

" Ye champions in love and war,
May your vows be crowned,

[1] A male singer.

And Thriti's and Shera's objections,
Lie level with the ground."

To sum up, he went to Mehelooji again.

"Sire," he said, unbooting himself, "with your permission and to add *eclat* to this grand undertaking, I will get on to your Majesty's shoulders and blow the Royal Trumpet."

Suiting action to word, he got on to the athlete's shoulder and the whole procession marched off within.

CHAPTER XV

THE CATASTROPHE

"In the midst of life, we are in death."

THINGS fell in in perfect order. The party seated itself under a cluster of Toddy trees. Mehelooji's favourite tree stood at the head. It was his father's pride that Mehelooji and the tree had grown together. Mehelooji always went into ecstacy when speaking of the taste of its Toddy. No one but Ramla, his oldest hand was allowed to get atop of it to draw Toddy from it. The fluid of this tree was to be the crowning taste of the drink to-day.

It was arranged that the singer should not dance and that she should only sing such songs as the party could hear with perfect freedom. The singer's first song and the party's first toast were in praise of the Great Giver of all bounties. Rusi was the accredited clown of the clan and had a keen sense of the length and latitude to which he was entitled. He filled three glasses with pure Toddy, balanced two of them over his shoulders and the third over his head and then blew the trumpet and said—

"Three cups I drink with eager zest,
Three cups of Toddy fine,
Which banish sorrow from my breast,
For memory leave no sign
Of past affliction ; not a trace
Remain upon my heart or smiling face."

Then removing one glass at a time, he quaffed them all in a trice, and proceeded—

"*Sakee*[1] ! Ere our life decline,
Bring the milky Toddy fine ;

[1] Cup-bearer.

Sorrow on my bosom preys,
Toddy alone delights my days.
Bring it, let its sweets impart
Rapture to my fainting heart.
Sakee! Fill the bumper high—
Why should Rusi unhappy sigh ?
Mark the glittering bubbles swim
Round the goblet's smiling brim.
Fill the *ghadiah* [1] almost over,
Drink the liquid gem for ever,
Thou shalt still in bowers divine
Quaff the soul-expanding Toddy fine."

These lines were accompanied by grimaces and sly twinges of the eye, which were fixed on Magdalene so funnily that she could never think of going into grimaces over it or objecting to it. Rusi's glee was infectious. Whilst he recited and the rest listened, the latter had the *ghadiahs* at their mouths, from which they drew copious draughts. The whole party was a-zest and a-glow.

To the three followers of the Prophet Mahomed, *viz.* : the singer, the *Sarangeewalla* and the *Tabalchi* wine and Toddy were prohibited. They chewed *pan* and *supari* [2]—and threw out long blood-red spits on to the open ground from between two fingers held close to the mouth—not an unusual mode of wetting their whistle with these musicians. The *Sarangeewalla* then strung up his strings, and the *Tabalchi* sat up erect and clapped away on the *tablas* [3] with his heavy fists ; whilst the singer Motidana, as if replying to Rustom and in sympathy with him, sang with her eyes fixed on Miss Macgregor—

"Since the God of Creation created the earth,
To a hero like Rustom he never gave birth.
He'll charm thy life,
From the weapons of strife,

[1] Earthen pot. [2] Betel leaf and nut. [3] Drums.

From stone and from wood,
From the serpent's tooth,
From fire and from flood,
And the beasts of blood."

"Hear! Hear!!" shouted the ladies. "*Shabbash* [1]! Well sung!!" shouted the gents.

The spirit of the trio rose in proportion and Motidana continued—

"Whilst drinking *sharab* [2] he never sees
The frowning face of his enemies;
Drink, O Rustom, freely of the grape; and nought
Can give thy soul one mournful thought.
Yonder is thy bride of witching power,
And wisdom is her marriage dower."

"*Kaisa atcha gana*!—What fine singing!" The gents all hurrahed and drank toast after toast to the health of Rusi and his bride, quite impervious to Magdalene's frowns and to the fact that her ire was rising. Thriti thought it time to interpose—

"Sahebo,—Sirs,—this is too much. Turn your wits to something else. Rusi, you are overacting the clown."

"O, bosh! Baisaheb," affirmed Erach, "be so good as to reserve your advice until it is wanted. We know what it is worth."

Jamshed looked as if he wanted to retort. Mehelooji, perceiving the danger, put in—

"Motidana, hast thou ever heard?—

"Toddy can the purest joy impart,
Toddy inspires the saddest heart;
Toddy gives cowards valour's rage,
Toddy gives youth to tottering age;
Toddy gives vigour to the weak,
And crimson to the pallid cheek;

---

[1] Bravo! [2] Red wine.

And dries up sorrow, as the sun
Absorbs the dew it shines upon."

"Sir, you speak well," said the singer, "but our *Pehelvan* [1] there (meaning Rustom) prefers *sharab* or wine to Toddy. Toddy is too mild for *Pehelvans*. Your *Pehelvans* never had it and never drank it." And then she sang—

"Come, *Sakee*, fill the wine-cup high,
And let not even its brim be dry ;
For wine alone has power to part
The rust of sorrow from the heart.
Drink to our hosts, in merry mood,
For fortune smiles, and these are good.
Quaffing red wine is better far,
Than shedding blood in strife or war.
Man is but dust ; and why should he
Become a fire of enmity ?—
Drink deep, all other cares resign ;
For what can vie with ruby wine ? "

"Where's the girl gone ? Where's the girl gone, Adoo ?—Ardeshir ! You are a regular *adokhra*.[2] Is it for that you have made her put on a *sari* ? Is it in this wise that you watch over her morals and manners? " suddenly shouted Mr. Ardeshir's genteel lady. "Look at the impudence,—look at the impudence,—she is romping there with that young reprobate."

"Mother, you must separate them for ever, if you don't wish to see the girl go to the wall," put in the wise mother's wiser daughter.

"Let the young hearts enjoy," said Ardeshir, who was fast getting tipsy and promised to be half-seas-over in another half hour. He was so determined to kill all his care in the Toddy to-day ; and unbeknown to him Rusi was introducing spoonfuls of brandy in

[1] A hero, especially the olden brave warriors of Persia or Iran.
[2] Dunce or blockhead.

his Toddy. "Ye are jealous that ye are no longer young. O Jealousy! Thou bane of womankind! I wish I were young again and fit to romp with them," shouted Ardeshir.

The children, hearing the squabble, came running, their colour heightened, and with eager looks they sat down close to Thriti and Magdalene as if nothing had happened. Meherbanoo and Shera rose from their places ready to fly at the juvenile pair, when a loud voice close by diverted their attention.

"Fortune-teller! Fortune-teller! Baisahebs and Shethsahebs, here I am: A Fortune-teller! I am great experience," he said in broken English. "I tells your Past and tells your Present, also reads your Future."

Erach and Jamshed rose to their feet.

"Yes, yes. Let's have him," said Erach.

"By no means. We don't want this scarecrow. I don't like the looks of him," observed Jamshed.

"A fig for your opinion. Who wants it?" said Erach.

"Calm yourselves, boys"; said Mehelooji, "we might try this man. He will read our fortunes."

"Yes; but whose is he to read first?" cried Jal innocently.

"Baisaheb Thriti's"—responded Erach.

Ardeshir suggested that lots be drawn. This was at once agreed to. And it fell to Thriti's lot first. Thriti hesitated and would not agree to hold out her hand to the fortune-teller who pretended to be a palmist. Erach came round, by right as it were, and while pretending to stroke her back and encourage her, slyly took down her *sod* [1] and with it the *mathabana*.

Magdalene and Jamshed glared at Erach.

"How dare you?" said Magdalene. "You ought to behave better."

"Mind your business, Miss, she is my *fiancée*; who are you to interfere?" And as if by accident, he let the small glass of Toddy

[1] The part of the *sari* going over the head and over the *mathabana*.

which he held in his hand fall down. The glass broke and the contents spread over Thriti's *sari* and soiled it. Meherbanoo and Shera tittered.

"The scoundrel!" cried Ardeshir between his teeth.

"He did it purposely," cried Jamshed.

"Yes, yes," shouted Jal and Roshan in one voice.

"You lie," retorted Erach.

Thriti's eyes filled with tears. Erach looked triumphant and exchanged glances with Meherbanoo and Shera, whilst Magdalene and Jamshed busied themselves with cleaning and drying Thriti's dress.

The oracle taking again the unwilling hand of Thriti than spoke :

"Here amidst these varied tracings,....."

("Horrid tracings,....." put in the bridegroom-elect.)

"Intertwining, interlacing."

("Interposing, undermining,"...observed the bridegroom-elect.)

"I discern the soft sayings,

"Of the bosom's tenderest feelings," concluded the oracle.

("Bitterest bickerings and fraud," put in the bridegroom-elect.)

Jamshed was about to rush at Erach. Mehelooji stood up. Even Ardeshir tottered to his feet. An encounter between the young men seemed inevitable. When lo! There was at first a loud and sudden clang and clatter and then a thump and a thud! The old and favourite Toddy tree had come down with the weight of Mehelooji's servant Ramla, who had climbed up to draw the Toddy. All escaped uninjured except Thriti who was caught in the leaves and the unlucky Ramla who was crushed to death underneath.

A scene of consternation ensued. A wail escaped Mehelooji's lips. Thriti's predicament restored him. She had swooned. Jamshed felt her pulse. Magdalene made use of smelling-salts. They forced a little brandy down her throat and after a while Thriti opened her eyes. The children were crying loudly. Erach,

Meherbanoo and Shera were the only three who looked unconcerned and unaffected.

At this stage, a crude-looking crone was seen rushing towards them, beating her breast with both hands and moaning and wailing loudly. It was the dead man's wife, Ramli. She screeched and screamed, invoked curses on the bitter day and hour, said she had foreseen it would come to this, for the tree was old and rotten at the roots and that Mehelooji should have had sense enough to pull it down long ere this.

"You see, Mehelooji," Chandan ventured to speak through her tears, when she found words, "You see, husband dear, my dream has come true enough, though in another shape."

Mehelooji felt it ; but to indulge her at this moment would, he thought, be unwise. He, therefore, cut her short by a simple "Bother your dream. This is no time to talk about it, Chandan." And drawing himself up to his full height he played the commandant.

"Here ! you fellows ;—Bhanya, Kanya, Rakhma, Rama—Here ! Remove Ramla gently to his *kholi*.[1] Take Ramli also there. Pacify her and the children. Tell them they will henceforward be my care."

"Yes, yes," muttered Chandan, "the son shall take the father's place. Ramli, we shall not let them out of our sight."

Mehelooji then went forward and with Jamshed and Rustom's help carried Thriti into the house like a babe. It seemed she had fainted through mere fright. She complained however of pins and needles in her eyes—the *cutchra* [2] of the dry leaves was the cause of it. Washings were applied and in a little while Thriti said to the joy of all that she felt better and liked to sit up. Mehelooji and Chandan and all except Meherbanoo and Shera were glad that on this occasion it was the aged Ramla that had gone to stand before his God. Mehelooji said, he had lived and died with the tree and that the tree should form part of his funeral pyre.

[1] Hut. [2] Rubbish.

CHAPTER XVI

CIVILISED SINNERS

"*Civilisation bows to decency.*"

BROWNING.

"*Our outward act is prompted from within,*
And from the sinner's mind proceeds the sin."

PRIOR.

MR. and Mrs. Mehelooji begged off a few minutes to be at Ramla's cottage and to see to the necessaries. The custom amongst the Hindus, to which sect Ramla belonged, is to see the relics of the deceased disposed of by fire within as short a space of time as possible. Meherbanoo and Shera pleaded headache and were for leaving immediately. Erach said the accident had upset him and voted for immediate dispersion. As the rest would not agree, the three left, apparently in a huff but overjoyed at the prospect of one another's company during the drive home. Roshan was not pressed to accompany them, as she might carry tales.

A few minutes after the trio had left, a hack victoria drove in hot haste and from it landed in great flurry and distress, with the help of an ayah, a middle-aged lady who looked almost fit to faint. She breathed hard and dropped into a chair the moment she was supported in by Rusi and Ardeshir. Who was this lady ? Let the reader judge from her words.

"*Mahari dikri ! Mahari dikri !* My daughter ! O, give me my daughter ! O, you won't see me alive if anything happen to her."

It was Thriti's mother, Jerbanoo. What was it that had brought her to Mehelooji's in this plight ? It must be something unusual. After she had met Thriti and pressed her to her heart, it

came out that somebody had phoned to Ardeshir's servant at his house asking him to take an immediate message to Thriti's mother downstairs that Thriti was almost crushed under a fallen tree ; that she was between life and death and that Jerbanoo should start for Mehelooji's at once.

Who was it that had sent the message? All present pleaded their entire ignorance of it. Meherbanoo's ayah, who received the message and who had accompanied Jerbanoo in her distress, even at the risk of her mistress's displeasure, stated that she had asked for the name of the person who had phoned, but he would not give it. That for a moment she had thought it was Erach Sheth's voice ; but she would not swear to it. Everybody, even the singer and her companions, stood aghast at what they had heard. There was a solemn pause, during which each thought and each drew his or her own conclusions. It was the doing, they thought, of those that had just left so unceremoniously.

They had left red-handed and it was good they did so ; for had they stayed, there would certainly have been a serious breach of the party's peace on this occasion at least. They buried their own opinion within their breasts, when a girl-servant who had overheard what had passed, stated unhesitatingly that she had seen Mr. Erach at the phone before Thriti was brought into the bungalow, that he had been looking frightened and had carefully noted that nobody was about before he touched the phone.

CHAPTER XVII

OUR BACHELOR BAHADUR [1]

" When youth is fallen, there's hope the young may rise,
But fallen age for ever hopeless lies."

CRABBE.

THERE was again a pause,—so serious that, as the novelist has it, "even a pin could be heard to fall." It was broken by Rusi addressing the singer Motidana, as suddenly as if awakened from a dream.

" Motidana, come, don't be shy, give me a dance. We will have the *saamp ka nautch* [2] with *bansli* [3] accompaniment. See, I have got the *bansli* ready. Your husband knows me too well to think I'll run away with you. Muradkhan, eh ! " he proceeded, addressing the *sarangiwalla*, " do you think so ? "

" *Haan, Shethji jaisi aapki murzi.*" (Yes, Sir. Just as you please.)

You are looking curious, reader. You want to pry deeper and have a wider look into the characters of Rusi and Motidana.

Rusi was the last of a lot of Chandan's brothers and sisters. Except Rusi they were all dead and gone. He was a gentlemen at large,—a gay man about town minus its vices. He had plenty of wit and lived on it. He had a fairly good school and college education, had gone into more than one service and run after more than one job and chucked them away. Mehelooji advised him to be a merchant or trader like his forefathers and apprenticed him to the brother Macgregors. Rusi styled them dummies and said they were too dull for him. Mehelooji had reasons to believe that

[1] Brave. [2] Snake-dance. [3] The Indian flute.

his wife spoiled him with valuable presents but he would not check it or give out that he knew anything about it.

Rusi was a bachelor but not a confirmed one. He wanted a girl after his heart, he said. That one was Miss Macgregor : but as it was not likely she would accept him, he would remain single till the end of his days. He also thought he had no right to marry until he had a fixed income of his own, which he said he was not likely to have in this world at least. The charge of school and college education for our girls proving a curse, after travelling from the land of the Yankees to the land of John Bull, is transmitted here. The growing distaste for marriage is ascribed in a certain measure to this. Rusi, though a bachelor, was invited and welcomed into many respectable families with marriageable daughters but not so much as a breath of scandal or rumour against him was out. Girls ran after him in shoals. But he always outstripped them. To every girl he met he said he was loved and liked by so many but he held a particular one nearest to his heart, before whom he would kneel in the near future. The one who heard him of course took it that she was the one dearest to him and was satisfied.

Coming to Motidana, girls of her class are vowed to celibacy. She was middle-aged, fair-skinned, well-featured and well-set. People thought she was verging towards *em bon point*, but as yet she was far from being fat or stout. Unlike her sect and in defiance of all precedents, she had married Muradkhan, the muscular *sarangiwalla* with the German Zohak's mustaches and furious features. She maintained that her heart had gone out to him over ten years ago when she first made her appearance or *debut* on the singing stage. The *tabalchi*, Bankemiya, was the fat man's rival, but after the latter's success had vowed to stick to the couple like a brother. This was the explanation, which Rusi gave to Mehelooji, half an hour after, when he returned to the house and saw him dancing with the singer. There was so much frankness in the young man's face, so much force in his words, that Mehelooji was at once

impressed with the truth of all he said. From that moment forward Mehelooji was more cordial and more hospitable to the singer and her companions.

Rusi had received *talim* or training in Hindi music and dance in the singer's apartments, on payment of fees, under the eagle eye of the furious looking *sarangiwalla*. It was a great privilege inasmuch as the Indian artist is averse to the tricks of his trade and the secret of his art being disclosed. The *saamp* or snake—the mortal enemy of mankind—is known to have a peculiar charm for music. He is enticed, entranced and charmed away from his place of hiding by the voice of the *bansli* and finally enthralled. The fact of the Indian snake-dance having been charmed away like the snake to the land of John Bull is no secret.

The dance served to restore the equanimity of the spectators ; but even with this they dispersed with feelings much different from those with which they had entered the premises.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE INTERREGNUM

" The winged day
Can ne'er be chained by man's endeavour,
That life and time shall fade away,
While Heaven and Virtue bloom for ever."

T. MOORE.

A STORY of home life like a romance goes a-jumping and a-skipping. It is my privilege, and I ask you, reader, to skip over a period of six months. In six months, six million events may occur ; and they did occur in all parts of the world during this half year's interregnum. But we are not concerned with them all. We will pick up from that half yearly abyss only such as are wound up in the varied fortunes of our characters and those events were not a few.

In these six months, six hundred squabbles and strifes had taken place between Ardeshir and his spouse. Six hundred pains and penalties were inflicted on Roshan and a like number of indignities were heaped by her mother and sister on her poor father's devoted head. And yet,—yes,—yet,—Roshan contrived to grow and thrive and Ardeshir managed to scramble and live.

Erach had ingratiated himself more and more with the two women and was trying less and less to conceal his like for Shera and his dislike for Thriti. He was waiting only to throw up the latter until a certain event, which he and the two women were fostering and fomenting, came to pass. He had taken to racing, gaming and drinking, and was neglecting his studies.

Rusi would not be Rusi if he changed his unprofitable but harmless ways. Joseph and John Macgregor and Magdalene plied

the even tenor of their way. When I say this of Magdalene, I perhaps stumble, as the scope of her usefulness had developed manifold during the period of which we now speak. Jamshed had completed his law terms and bloomed into a full-fledged advocate at the bar of His Majesty's High Court of Justice. Jal, though so young, was beating all past records at school. Now for a shock to your sensitive susceptibilities!

Thriti's mother was gathered to her dear husband in heaven, these three months and more. The shock imparted to her by the telephone iniquity had half killed her. As if not satisfied with this, nature had struck her another and a more serious blow. It was—but why? When we speak of Thriti, you will know what it was. Well, then, what about Thriti? Did she also die? Did she marry? Did she elope? Tush. It was not in her to do the last. Like the one to whose lot it has fallen to chronicle her misfortunes,—she had become blind.

Sorry am I, if this hurt you; but the occurrence is not uncommon. People do become blind round and about us daily, as suddenly as so many die, here, there and everywhere. The only difference is that a register of blindness is not maintained the same as that of births, marriages and deaths. The similitude is that the sympathy and anguish, if any, of friends and relatives are as short-lived in the case of sudden blindness as in that of death. Dear me! Dear me! they say he or she is killed alive. What will he do? How will she go on? Will they be a burden on us? Have they a right to live now that they are blind? And what will they live upon? They certainly don't expect us to help them? If it be our duty to do so we are too poor to do it. Yet the blind somehow contrive to live through the natural period of their existence. Some do mop and mourn, and shorten their lives; but we read of none laying violent hands on himself.

Thriti did mop and mourn. She had forebodings and warnings of eye trouble, and it was said to be accelerated by the *cutchra* of

the leaves of the fallen tree, that had penetrated into her eyes and given such a fright to her at Mehelooji's. The doctors agreed that just then her vision was entirely clouded. As to the question of cure, they were as usual disagreed. And who can decide when they are so? It may be an entire cure, a partial cure, or no cure at all. Liquids and hypodermic injections were tried, and an operation was recommended. Thriti had a horror of this, and so had her mother; so as usual the doctors took shelter in good food and change of scene and air. Easier said than done. This doctorly doctrine means money. But what is it to the doctor sahebs?

When the conviction of her blindness came home to Thriti, she stood electrified. "What will I do? How will I walk about? How shall I dress? How shall I dine?" These and a multitude of other questions passed vividly through her mind; but her greatest grief lay in the fact of her being unable to look on the faces of those whom she loved most in this world and who were dearer to her than life. Even a last look at the face of her dying mother was denied to her. Her mother wept and wept bitterly; for she had no fear of Thriti catching her in this condition. She tried to console but the words died on her lips.

My visits to the family were not so frequent as before and the only consolers were Jal, Magdalene, Jamshed and Ardeshir. There is no consolation so telling and so abiding for a blind as the soothing words of one similarly afflicted. Magdalene did not take long to find this out. The moment she did so, she blamed herself for her forgetfulness and sent for me.

Of all the senses that most affect the mind and aid the easy working thereof, the sense of sight is the most important. Minus the sight the mind is left to shift for itself and to its own devices. It is pre-occupied and its action greatly hampered. It is unable to look far out into or far near nature and in course of time, unless the will power is most powerful, it loses all touch with nature and its surroundings and begins to live in a solitude of its own. In such

condition the only materials for recoupment is plenty of occupation and absence of home troubles. Change of scene, change of surroundings and plenty of good company are as important to a confirmed invalid as to a blind, aye, more to the latter. The less you leave the blind and his mind to their own resources the better for him. But the best thing is for the blind himself to take the reins of government of his mind into his own hands and to control it as no one else can help him to do it.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BLIND DOCTOR'S FIRST PRESCRIPTION

" *If we see right, we see our woes ;*
Then what avails it to have eyes ?
From ignorance our comfort flows :
The only wretched are the wise."

PRIOR.

THE announcement of my appearance was as it were a signal for Thriti to fly to me. She laid her delicate hands into mine and sobbed audibly.

"Why, what is it, my dear ? " I said. " You weep, because the inevitable has come to pass perhaps earlier than you expected and you have become outwardly blind. You weep, because you only take count of the disadvantages and discard the advantages. You have lost your bodily and wordly sight ; but you think nothing of the expansion and development of the new sight—I mean your inward sight—the everlasting inner power of perception or of the keenness, shrewdness and activity, which the loss of your material light will create in you. Why, blind as you are you should now expect to achieve many a thing which you could never have done open-eyed. Come, come. Wipe away those tears. Remember that you are the scion of an old and renowned race, who though fallen yet pride themselves on their blue blood. Remember the conversation we had when I met you here the first time after your dear father's departure to heaven. Ah ! it seems to me, and can't you conceive, he is now looking down on you through his resthold in the skies and encouraging and emboldening you through me, his old and humble friend. Remember the words your good mother uttered on

her death-bed when we all stood by mournfully, unable to evade the inevitable :

" *Dikri Mahari*, I've no dread of death :
What is there in this vital breath ?
My husband was good and he died ;
And death will lay me by his side.
Was ever man immortal ?—Never !
We cannot, *dikri*, live for ever !
Mine was the task in life to claim,
In world, a bright and spotless name.
What boots it to be pale with fear,
And dread each grief that awaits us here ?
Protected by the power divine,
Our lot is written ;—why repine ? "

" Thriti," I continued, " you should thank Heaven that you are not like the blind that parade our streets. You have good birth, good looks, youth, education and vigour, withal the friendship of this angelic young lady, Miss Macgregor, and this adorable young friend of ours, Jamshed ; and above all, the love and affection of a devoted brother. Ah, Thriti ! Something tells me that you have now dried your tears and are finding strength and comfort in my words. In a week hence, you will go about the house, eat, drink, dress and undress, comb your hair, take your bath, open and close your cupboards, put and remove your clothing on the peg. chat, talk and hear, as if nothing had happened. A fortnight more and you will think of bestirring yourself. I think I told you that the blind is a reader of character and fortune. I have read your fortune once before. I'll do so now again. A time will come—and that is not far off—when you will have to rely on your own shoulders for your bread. Friends there will be, and there are, who will offer to serve you ; but you will thankfully decline the offer. A bright star will guide you to action. Need I tell you who that bright star is ? It is Miss Macgregor."

"Most assuredly!" interposed Magdalene. "That I will do, and much more;—my word on it, Mr. B—."

"Bide a wee, Miss," I said, "the assurance is unneeded. You will take her round, introduce her to your pupils, read to her, sing to her, put her in the way as if you were her sister,—prepare her in short for fight. She has an ear, a voice and a touch for music, and a good hold over English. You will teach her violin and mandoline. Piano she can already play upon."

"Why, goodness," cried Thriti, "Mr. B—, you are surely not making fun of poor me? Don't you know moreover this piano will be too expensive a luxury in this house now? I shall have to say good-bye to this article along with many others. O! O! they were my mother's pets. Do you think,—do you think, Mr. B—, friends will stand by me for ever? It would be taking too much advantage of their goodness. It would be simply trespass. Besides . . . besides . . . " and she stopped.

"Have it out, have it out, speak on," said Magdalene, "you were about to say something about Mr. Jamshed."

"Yes, now that her mother is gone perhaps my presence is distasteful to her. She had often warned me not to be here too much, for fear of people's tongues wagging and it is now more so than ever," said Jamshed.

"O, Jamshed!" Thriti cried. "For Heaven's sake, do not say, cousin mine, that your presence is distasteful to me. But what will Erach say? What will Meherbanoo and Shera think of it? Whatever he is, I can't go back upon my word. Let him give me up. Maiji's death-bed words are ringing in my ears: 'Thriti, don't break with Erach if you can help it. Remember your father and my dead brother have passed their word upon it. If he breaks it, welcome. Perhaps so much the better for you'."

"Thriti dear," Jal interposed, "do you think there is any chance of Erach sticking on to you now that . . . " and he stopped, for Magdalene had raised a warning finger to him.

Thriti's tears flowed faster than ever.

"Yes, yes, Jal dear, say it out, . . . 'now that I am blind'. They say that blindness is often a punishment for sin. I have committed no sin and why should God have punished me in this way?"

"Thriti," said I, "you are blaspheming. God works His great ends through means, which though apparently unjust are the best. Who knows but what you call your punishment may prove to be your salvation? Erach might not have given you up but for this apparent punishment; who knows that when he does give you up somebody else a much better mate—might not seek you for yourself alone? I have read of blind girls making better matches than many with sight. You should not forget, Thriti, that Jamshed is your cousin and he has as much right to be here as any other cousin of yours. The occasion warrants it, besides. He would be a deserter and a coward, if he desert you now."

Jamshed was about to reply, when a firm voice firmly interposed from behind: "Right, right! I cry ditto!—I heartily second you." It was the voice of Rusi. "I blame myself for deserting Thriti so long in this great hour of her sorrow. Shake hands with me, old girl, dear girl, my own affectionate one, charming dove,. . . O! What am I saying? . . . Your pardon, Miss Macgregor, my respects to you. So many tender ones run after me that I have to accost each on her own merit. Thriti, I wish,—yes, I do wish heartily and God is my witness that I could give half the light of my eyes—say one of my two eyes—to save one of yours. Oh! That the exchange were possible! But it is not. Why! Because His ways are inscrutable."

Rusi's presence at this juncture was most opportune and served to put the company into good mood.

"Thriti," I said, "when I hinted at your playing on the piano, you said I was making fun of you. I am speaking from past experience. See, here's the piano. Now, Miss Macgregor, you

take your seat and make Thriti sit by you. Play away the duet that you executed so nicely when I was last here. What say you, Thriti? Your fingers shake? You find they won't run? Tush, tush! It's all fancy. Methinks they have already commenced to run. Miss Macgregor, you had better start. Thriti's fingers will vie with yours."

And so they did. The company clapped their hands. Miss Macgregor, taking a hint from me, commenced to sing. A few minutes after, Thriti gulped down a sob and followed Magdalene in a pathetic and plaintive voice.

"Can't we all resort to the table and satisfy the cravings of the inner man?" said Rusi. "We will accept no refusal from you, Thriti."

"Come, come," we all said, "we will repair to the table. Miss Macgregor will do us the favour to help the ayah bring the dishes."

"O," said Thriti, suddenly rising as if quite in possession of her eyesight, "that won't do. Please trouble not, Magdalene mai. I'll see to it."

"There," Rusi cried with a triumphant whistle and a hurrah, "I'll go and assist Miss Macgregor and Jamshed will assist Thriti. Come, Jamshed, lead Thriti to the kitchen; we'll walk behind like maids of honour."

The dinner was out, we all dined; and when the time for departure came, Rusi thrust a small packet in my hand, observing, "Doctor, there's ten bobs for your fees,—a small amount and nothing like what you deserve; but I will remember you in my will. Three cheers, ladies and gents, for the blind physician."

We then dispersed, but not before I had put back the money in Rusi's pocket.

CHAPTER XX

FRIENDS AT WORK

" There is no true potency, remember, but that of help ;
Nor true ambition, but ambition to save."

RUSKIN.

" THRITI dear, come, cheer up. I have secured you a tuition ; and a very good one too. Good family, good return, and good cheer, always welcome. No knocking about. It is a tuition worth twenty," proceeded Magdalene in her easy non-chalant way, as if she was doing the most ordinary thing in the world. " The only condition they make is that you will not leave them at lunch but take it with them. You must be one of the family and must make their home your own ; understand ? O, here's Mr. Ardeshir. Listen, Mr. Ardeshir, I have secured a capital client, as they say in legal parlance, for Thriti. The Bahadurshahs, you know. They have plenty of money, plenty of hospitality and plenty of politeness. They say, they and the Patels—Thriti's family you know—are distantly related. Little Silla is to be her pupil. What do you think ? Her granny went into a sort of a genealogy, counting from the twentieth pedigree downwards to where the Bahadurshahs and the Patels ultimately branched off and formed distinct flanks. The motor which takes the boys to school will take Thriti to ' Bahadur Mahal ' on its drive back to it. The ayah can look to Jal's *khana*."

" Oh, it is so very very good of you, Miss Macgregor, said Ardeshir. " May God bless you."

" Too good, indeed, uncle dear ; but I will not accept it. No—by no means. If you knew what's what, you will say the same," put in Thriti. " Magdalene, you have resigned the place to put me in."

"And if it be so," said Magdalene, "what's wrong? Is not your need greater than mine? I have eyes; you have them not. I have a father and an uncle; you have not. The Bahadurshahs say they can get me tuitions elsewhere when I want them. But I don't want them. I am overworked and would rather give up a tuition or two than secure new ones. But, ah, dear me! dear me! how forgetful I am, Thriti! Just read this letter." Then correcting herself she said, "read it for her, Ardeshirji."

Ardeshir started at the sight of the handwriting.

"Oh, Lord!" he said, shaking his fist in the air. "Do my eyes fail me? Am I gone mad? Why, it is Shera's handwriting!"

And he slowly read the letter out:—

Meher Villa,
Grant Road,
3rd July 19—.

Dear Miss Macgregor,

Pray do not be surprised or look chary at what I say. We are quite serious—I mean mother and myself. You know my father's disposition and how he spoils little Roshan. About this the least said the soonest mended. Suffice it then that we have made up our mind to remove her from school and to put her in charge of a lady tutor. She now wears a *sari* and had better be at home. We write to know if you will accept the place. About four hours' work daily, the rest of the day will be yours. Will Rs. 40 per month please you? If not, you have only to say so; and we will think over it. Please do not show the letter to any one or depend on what people say about us. We have nothing to do with people.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,
SHERA DALAL.

As in converse so in writing, Sherbanoo did not mention her father's name. She said her signature looked and sounded better without Ardeshir.

The reading over, the writer's father stamped his foot on the ground. He fumed and foamed and literally boiled over with indignation, which was not his wont. He muttered execrations against the mother and daughter ; talked something about tricks, foul play, a plot to crush some one and what not.

Then cooling down, he said, " Miss Macgregor, Thriti, I do not talk at random. I speak from actual experience. Erach has been too much with these two intriguing women lately and I swear by Avesta they are upto some serious mischief. It is part and parcel of a plot which I unwittingly overheard some months ago. Magdalene, *dikri*, I should bless the day which could set you up at my house as Roshan's teacher ; but my mind misgives me. If you knew those three so well as I do, you would say the same. Why, it must be either to give you a bad name and send you out without a certificate or that they think money will tempt you to take sides with them and leave Thriti completely in the lurch. For Heaven's sake, *dikri*, write in and decline the offer at once."

" What is the plot you speak of, uncle dear ? Do tell me, for God's sake, do tell me," pleaded Thriti ; and she wound her hands round Ardeshir's neck persuasively.

"Thriti," said Magdalene, " what good will it do you to hear it ? For aught we know it may be nothing at all. Bitterness engendered by ill-feeling loses the mind in fanciful exaggerations " ; and she then whispered to Ardeshir not to give out what he knew if it were something that Thriti had better not hear.

I see the curious reader looking curiously and lost in wonder at Miss Macgregor's concluding words. Was it not like cheating Thriti ? Would she have ventured to whisper to Ardeshir, had not Thriti been sightless ? The answer to this is simple enough. In all that the Almighty does He always keeps good and evil in sight. It is for this that good often comes out of evil.

Ardeshir's evasion, however, served only to accentuate Thriti's curiosity ; so much so that Magdalene who was anxious to save her from anxiety gave way.

The placid man then related bit by bit what had occurred on that eventful day when he was a self-made prisoner in the bath-room of his own house and had overheard Meherbanoo and Shera hatching a plot.

"My life on it," he said. "I have not been able to fathom the full depth of their machinations. I wish, O how I wish I had consulted you, Magdalene, about this. That fellow Erach is mixed up in it; or else I shave my mustache. I never could like that scape-grace. Confound his impudence!"

"It's no use your taking it on in this way, Mr. Ardeshir," observed Magdalene. "We must devise some means to dive deeper into their doings if possible."

"O! But surely they can mean no harm to me or to Jal either," said Thriti. "We have had enough of misery and they can't be so cruel when I am blind. Besides, are not they my kith and kin? Have not they been more sympathetic, almost obliging, since I have been reduced to this condition? Erach occasionally calls and sees me and they have extended the period of our lease for the occupation of this suite of rooms."

"The more's the danger," put in Ardeshir. "They know you want to sell off largely and that it would be simply foolish for you to pay so much rent. They know you are anxious to move and would have done so much earlier but for your recent bereavement."

"Ardeshirji, Thriti, it is time we look the danger full in the face. Would to Heaven we are wrong, would to Heaven their hearts soften; but, Thriti, you must be very careful and must ask the ayah and her daughter Rosy to be so too. They must not miss or fail to watch any even the slightest thing that may occur during your absence and to communicate it to you immediately you return home. You must be wary. Send for me even at midnight if necessary. You must prove how brave you are even in your blindness. Keep the front door closed, and ascertain who it is before you let any one in. Above all, by no means should you or

Jal show that you suspect anything. If anything you should be more friendly with them than ever. It would be dissimulation, you would say ; but the end justifies the means."

This little warning speech and the words that follow came of course from Magdalene.

" I'll ask Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji to be here more frequently, and you, uncle, must beg of Rusi, I mean Mr. Rustom, to keep a sharp look-out and see that no harm comes to these innocents. Whatever his faults, I know he is good and brave and true to the very core. You can safely tell him all that you have told us. "

" I thank you heartily, Miss Macgregor, for your compliment. It will inspire me to be braver and truer than ever ; at least,

Till peace and plenty return to Thriti's door,
And strife and squabble trouble her home no more,"

—gaily remarked Rusi who had entered unseen. " Please do not think, Miss Macgregor, I am the composer of these rhymes. It was one of your own distinguished race that did it."

" You are wrong, Mr. Rustom," said Magdalene. " The author was every inch an Englishman : we are Scotch. But even if he were a Scotchman, I doubt if he would have allowed you to take liberties with his lines."

" Didn't you say, Miss, a few minutes ago, 'the end justifies the means ' ? " remarked Rusi.

This evoked a hearty laugh.

" To work, to work," said Magdalene. " Time and tide wait for no man."

She then seated herself before a desk and coolly penned a letter.

" There, *Masaji*, uncle," she said, " I have prepared a reply to go to your daughter. "

Macgregor Lodge,
Byculla,
5th July 19—.

Dear Miss Dalal,

Many thanks for your letter which was duly to hand yesterday. It is really very good of you to think of me so well and to ask me to be Roshan's tutor. Money is no consideration with me where the interests of dear little Roshan are concerned ; and I wish you had not doubted your offer of pay suiting me. I wish I were free to accept it. As matters, stand, however, my time is so fully taken up by my present engagements that I have none to spare for my little friend. In a month or two I shall have more time, as one of my pupil's family intend to go and settle up-country ; and if nothing unusual happen in the meantime I shall at once write in and ask you when I should commence work.

With kind regards and repeated thanks,

I remain,
Yours sincerely,
M. MACGREGOR.

"It is well written," said Thriti.

"It couldn't be better," observed Ardeshir.

"It could be A1," said Rusi. "But who is there that will listen to an empty pocket like me ? If this Scotch lady who has no right to steal our costume, in which by the way she looks so adorable, will allow it, I will make a suggestion."

They all laughed, especially Thriti, who was nearly convulsed. It put her surprisingly into good spirits and she cried out, "O ! Rusi, do tell us your suggestion. Magdalene shall adopt it."

"Well then, instead of saying 'Dear Miss Dalal' I would say 'Dear Cousin Shera.' For has not this adorable young lady adopted this worthy old gentleman as her uncle-elect ? The signature ought to be 'Your affectionate cousin, Magdalene '."

"I rule it out of order, Mr. Empty-pocket," said Magdalene, "for the simple reason that it will create complications. For does not Ardeshirji call me *dikri*—daughter ? I could not be Shera's cousin and sister at the same time."

This evoked another laugh, and the friendly union dispersed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VIPER AND HIS VENOM

"Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

SHAKESPEARE.

ANOTHER skip, this time only of a month, and we find ourselves in a well laid-out and commodious bungalow on the breezy heights of Malabar Hill. It is Bahadur Mahal. A bright little girl graced the window of the front corridor. I say graced advisedly, as little Shirin Bahadurshah, familiarly known as Sillu or Silla, really did grace the window.

Though not very fair, her features were finely delineated, well-cut and charmingly inviting. Her skin was rich and glossy and there was a quiet dignity and serenity in her looks. She was graceful in person, graceful in dress and in manners. Her ways were as winning as was her appearance. To see her was to like and love her. The world and its ways had not touched her and let us hope will not venture to approach her at least until she is able to fight against them without the aid of her parents.

She was the only daughter of the Bahadurshahs besides two sons who were much younger than her. An only daughter is gratuitously taken by many as a spoilt child. The reader should have no such apprehensions about Silla ; for she was perfectly well brought up and singularly well behaved. She was quick at learning and strong at retaining. She was great friends with Roshan. The same age ; the same looks ; the same size ; and the same temperament. What wonder then that those who saw them for the first time mistook them for twins ! Silla's hair was light,

and her eyes were slightly bluish, soft and appealing. Roshan's hair was jet-black. Her eyes bore the same hue. They were large and penetrating. They formed the most attractive feature about her and would have made her attractive independently of her other attractions.

Miss Bahadurshah appeared to be anxiously awaiting the arrival of someone. Consulting her wrist-watch, she exclaimed, "Half-past eleven! And no sign of the motor or of Thriti either. What could it be? Oh, what could it be?"

Thriti had been her tutor a good month and more. It was usual for the motor which took the boys to school at ten of the morning to pick up Thriti on its way back to Bahadur Mahal. On this particular day, however, the boys had started full one hour earlier and though it was 11–30 now the motor had not yet returned.

"What is it? Could it be anything wrong with the motor? Or is it that she is ill? These motor accidents are so frequent and so terrible." Let Silla stand here and ruminate and you reader follow me for a while to the interior of the house.

In a neatly furnished apartment and seated at a table was Silla's mother Dinbanoo. Standing before her with a letter in hand was her husband Mr. Behman Bahadurshah. The pair seemed to be made for each other. They were middle-aged, tall and good-looking to a degree. Their air and manner at once inspired respect and confidence.

"Just read this, Dina," said Mr. Behman handing the letter to his wife. "It was to hand a fortnight ago but I was indecisive if I should show it to you or not. It is anonymous and deserved to be consigned to the waste-paper basket; but I have preserved it lest it should be of use some day. As is the way with them, the writer says the letter has been penned in the interests of the reader."

"Dear Sir,

"The writer of this letter is not unknown to you. He

wishes you and your family well. But for this, this letter of his would not have seen the light of day. Some day, after it has done its own good work, the writer will declare himself; but at present he is sorry he is forced to withhold his name.

"The girl you have admitted into your house is unsuited morally and intellectually to cross its threshold, much less to be your dear and only daughter's tutor. Her character is stained. She has evil in her—evil in her nature, evil in her heart, evil in her mind and evil in her person. Though betrothed to one of her cousins she is flirting openly with and making overtures of marriage to another. True she is blind but all blind are not deserving of sympathy. Your sympathy is misplaced and sure to be abused. The person who introduced her to you is but too well aware of this. She has committed a most revolting breach of the confidence you have so long reposed in her and for that reason you have been well rid of her. See that this person also does not get admission into your house again. If the writer be not believed, it will be the worse for you.

Yours, etc.

A Well-Wisher."

"There, Behmanji, I have done reading it. It is the grossest villification of Thriti and Magdalene. It is blatant hypocrisy and perverse falsehood. Untruth runs through every line and note of it. You should not foul your hands with it any longer. Destroy it, dear, destroy it at once."

"My dear, I quite agree with you except as to its destruction, which might mean the destruction of Thriti's salvation and the triumph of her enemy some day. It is letters like this that have snatched men from the very jaws of the gallows. But what do you want to do with Thriti? Won't you turn her out?"

"Turn her out?" vociferated the usually meek and modest

Mrs. Bahadurshah. "Turn her out? I am surprised you say so?"

"Not so fast, not so fast, wifie. I was only testing you. It is rarely that an anonymous letter falls flat on a woman's ear. They all swallow them and are killed or rather kill the traduced with the venom instilled into them by the traducer. We will know the viper and gather him to his fate some day."

In went the letter carefully into one of Mr. Bahadurshah's capacious pockets. Out he then went at one door and his better-half at another.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MISCHIEF BEGINS

" For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."

DR. I. WATTS.

" WHAT are you at, Silla ? You have been at the window fully an hour. I wonder you don't feel tired," said the mother, gently smoothing the girl's plentiful hair which was ruffled by the full westerly breeze. " Shirin," continued the mother, " I wish I had not engaged...," and good as she was she stopped, for she knew she was not going to tell the truth.

" You wish you had not engaged Thriti as my tutor, Mamma ? But I know you don't mean it."

" Say Thritibai or Miss Patel, Silla."

"I should like to do so, Mamma ; but she would not hear of it. There should be no reserve, she says, between good and affectionate friends. Love begets love and regard begets regard, she says ; she will win my respect and regard not as a tutor, not as a superior but as a friend. She has extracted a promise from me that I call her Thriti and no more. Maiji, Mamma, when I think—O, when I think of her misfortune I doubt the very justice of God."

"Pshaw, girl ! You should not say so. There is none wiser than He. This is one of God's own secrets and it would be folly to be wise where ignorance is bliss."

" But, Mamma, what do you say ? Would it not have been better had Thriti been born blind ? "

The good Mamma was fairly cornered at this question. She was at a loss to reply. Where is the parent that has not confessed to this disability at times ? A clever man of fifty has often been nonplussed by a child of five. This little girl of fifteen had put five

hundred such questions to her mother, during this small run of her life, which had dumbfounded her mother. And this was one of them. So the mother tried to evade.

"But you don't call Miss Macgregor, Magdalene, my dear?"

"O, that's simple enough, Maiji; because she never asked me to. But, why don't you tell me what I want to know, Mamma? I won't go and peach. I won't tell Thriti. I want to know if it would not have been better for her to have been born blind," persisted the girl.

Here was a damper. To fence it once again the mother had to shift.

"Just run, Silla, and phone to the boys."

"O Mamma, but there is no phone at the school, you know."

"Well then, phone to Thriti."

"O, there's one at her house—I mean, at her auntie's but she is not allowed to have access to it."

"I think we had better wait in that case, girl, a wee bit longer," said the mother. "We will send Rama in a hack victoria to find out what's up."

"Just as you please, Mamma; but do tell me what I want to know."

The master of the house, who was comfortably located in an easy-chair and overhearing the little passage-at-arms between the mother and the daughter, from behind an ornamental wainscotting, came forward at this juncture to help his own darling.

"You want to know, darling, if it would not have been better for Thriti to have been born blind. What applies to Thriti applies to the whole class of blind. So modulate your question, my dear, and inquire whether it would not be better for any one to be born blind than to go blind at a later period of life. There is so much to be said on both sides; but considering all things, I think, Silla, it is better to be seeing as long as one possibly can than to be unseeing all along. There is only one advantage in being born blind;

and that is that with the absence of all knowledge of the beauty and grandeur of this great globe and of the starlit canopy the blind-born does not miss the blessing and the enjoyment that have been denied to him. He is consequently as merry and as gay as any one in full possession of his eyesight. Not having actually lost anything, he does not regret it until this great loss is brought home to him by books or words. He thinks there is no accomplishment or acquisition beyond what he is made to accomplish or acquire. Some think this sort of people are not of much use to themselves or to the world at large. This is one side of the picture. Let us look at the other side now. There's your Thriti, for instance. All these years the talent of her eyes collaborated with the talent of her mind. She could see, absorb, dwell upon and enjoy all that is great and good in nature and in art. The impressions thus obtained have been for once and for ever deposited in that great repository, the mind. So much so that even with the useless lodgment of what the poet has called 'that one talent, which is death to hide,' she can bring out, chew and cud those secreted contents when she is alone or unconsoled. She has had opportunities of cultivating her mind, of moving about in society, ingratiating herself with friends and relatives and learning and acquiring many things which she could not or perhaps would not have cared to do if she were born blind. Above all she now has the consolation of having once been able to look upon the faces of those who brought her into this world and of those whom she loves so deeply and so enduringly now. No books on earth and no other artificial aid could have helped her to do this, were she born blind. She must be missing these advantages very seriously now but that does not make her less fortunate than the blind-born if she would only think of it. Why it is so; you can gather from what I have said before."

Then without allowing the girl to finish her thanks which followed freely, he rang the bell and was about to order someone to go and find out the cause of the non-return of the motor car, when

the chauffeur himself came in breathless and panting. He was with the motor to Thritibai's as usual, waited for some time for her to come out and when he did go in to find out the cause of delay he found the whole house in a tumult. There were Meherbanoo and Ardeshir Sheth, Sherbanoo and Erach Sheth, besides the other tenants of the house. Thritibai, Roshanbai and Jal were in tears and shaking with fright. And what was worse there was the police a *gora* saheb who looked like a constable, a Mahomedan in white uniform who looked like a detective and one or two *pili-pugri-wallas*. They were standing before Thritibai's cupboard and evidently looking for something in it. He tried to find out from the ayah what it was all about but she put him off. At last when he could get a little speech of Sheth Ardeshir, the latter told him that there was trouble in the house and advised him to return home with the motor as fast as he could and tell his master to speak to him by telephone at once. This was all the man said he could say of it.

The worthy couple looked at each other in mute consternation. Their blood ran cold. They tried to divine each other's thoughts but could express nothing. Behman was the first to find his voice.

"What does it mean, Dina?" he murmured half musingly, half enquiringly. It surely has something to do with that letter you read only a few minutes ago. It is anonymous, you know. You see I was right in preserving it."

His gaze then travelled to Silla who had covered her face with her hands and was sobbing bitterly in a corner. He went up to her and drawing her close to himself tried to comfort her.

Then turning to his wife he said, "Come, Dina; *bahadur tha* (be brave). You ought to act, not whimper. Shirin is too wise to occupy us now. We must go to Thriti's at once."

He rang the bell, the motor was at the door, and off they started leaving Shirin in charge of the household with an assurance that they would give her good news soon enough.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE AVANT—COURIER AND THE AYAH

"Our life's a clock, and every gasp of breath
Breathes forth a warning grief."

QUARLES.

BEFORE you can be let fully into the mysteries of Meher Villa it is necessary for you, reader, to look back upon the eventful vista of the past week. It was a Friday. Jal being unwell was at home. Thriti had sent word to the Bahadurshahs that she could not be with them on that day. They were, both she and Jal, very down-hearted and were looking unusually gloomy and sad. Thriti's confidential ayah watched them quietly playing with their tea and toast. Just then there was a timid pull at the door bell. The puller, whoever it was, seemed to be afraid of making a noise. The door was slighty pushed in and there was Roshan looking through the bare opening. Her large and luminous eyes spoke volumes. But her words were few and hurried. Though it was her birthday she was going to school as her mother could not bear to see her at home even on that day. Papa and Mamma had the usual conflict about this, which ended as it always did in the former's discomfiture. Press her how they would, she could not, she said, step in even for a minute if she wanted to save her skin ; and before Jal could get at her she started off into the street and disappeared.

"Thritibai," said the ayah, "you are playing with the tea. If you don't take care you will overturn it and spoil your dress. Come, I'll put it in the saucer for you. It is hardly necessary for you to drink it out of the cup when there is nobody by. All that is good enough for *saheb loks*."

She then poured out some of the tea into the saucer and helped Thriti to drink it.

"Jalbaba" she proceeded, "what has come over you today? You have been playing with that slice this quarter of an hour. You are sorry Roshanbai is gone but she has seen the house and is bound to be back. If you both behave in this way, I shall have to tell them all that they had better look after you themselves or bring in some other ayah."

The ayah in these days is an institution in Indian households. In Parsi families she is mostly drawn from the Goanese or Feringi class who are purely and simply converted Indians. The ayah is maid of honour, the Baisaheb's lady-in-waiting, wet nurse, dry nurse, cook, seamstress, household drudge and what not. The Goanese ayahs bear high-sounding or corrupted Christian names from Mary, Isabel and Catherine down to Jackin, Marian and Rosy.

When a dry nurse swells into a wet one she is a sort of a hen of her walk and expects all the dry nurses to look upon her with reverence and respect. Her pay is four times as much as that of the dry nurse. The Baisaheb stands in constant awe and terror of her leaving. She has little or nothing to do and plenty to eat and drink. In proportion to the thickness of the *kunji* and purity of the paste, doth, she says, nature's fluid flow from out her breast and pass into the repository of the child. Whilst the wet nurse so regales herself and the Baisaheb's child draws the nourishing fluid from her breast, where is her own child? It is anything but regalement with it. It is bondaged for feed and upkeep for a mere pittance, say one-sixth the wet nurse's emoluments, with a low-caste woman of the same class who being an idle-bones, unkempt and unclean, lives on the lives of these innocent victims of their mothers' greed. It is these waifs and strays of Indian Christians, who go to swell the ranks of the ayahs, handmaids, cooks and butlers of the next generation.

There is a speck of brightness, a ray of hope, tiny and small though it be, on the cloudy horizon of the veriest of misfortunes. Candida—for that was the name of Thriti's ayah—formed this tiny little spot on the horizon of Thriti's troubles. She first came into the house as a wet nurse and had taken up her post at Thriti's cradle on her mother's *pachori.*[1] She was a steady, respectable widow, unlike many of her class who lay but little stress on the import of matrimonial bonds. Candida's daughter, Rosin alias Rosy whom Magdalene called Thriti's contemporary, lived at Thriti's house after Jerbanoo's death. She was going through her apprenticeship under the keen surveillance of Magdalene and Thriti, which her mother said would ere long be of great use to her in fighting the battle of life. Candida followed Thriti like a ghost. She never let her out of her sight except when she was going to Bahadur Mahal or for an outing with Magdalene or Jal.

"There, Thritibai, you have taken up the wrong pair of shoes. Thritibai, your *sari* is all awry. *Chhokri,*[2] you have not done up your hair properly to-day. There, hold the comb properly ; you are nervous. You don't want the *mathabana*—you girls go without it nowadays. Take care, Mai. There's the door sill—you will fall. Rosin, buckle up Bai's shoes—no, no, let her do it herself, she must be used to it. Come, now, you button up her blouse." This was the way the kindly nurse, who stood in the stead of a mother to Thriti, went on. Thriti could not think of what she would do if God forbid something were to happen to Candida. The only thing Candida could not do was to go substitute for Thriti's eyes in the matter of reading or for her hands in the matter of writing. Those duties were ungrudgingly performed by Jal and Magdalene, Jamshed occasionally lending a helping hand.

Finishing her tea, Thriti put her hands in the finger-cup, cleaned her mouth and rose hurriedly.

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[1] The fifth day observances after the birth of the first-born, borrowed from the Hindus. [2] Girl.

"Candida," she said, going close to her and bursting into tears, "I don't know—yes, I don't know what I should have done had you chosen to leave me. I should certainly have died or foundered like a ship in a storm. Come, Candida come, hold the sacred cross that you wear round your neck in your hand and swear by Jesus as we do by our *kushti* and *sudreh*, that come what may you will not leave me, that you will not yield to anyone's persuasion or pressure. Come, swear to me, or—or—I'll go mad." And there was another outburst of audible sobs and hot tears.

"*Chhokri*, child,—Mai! Thritibai, what ails thee to-day? You are very naughty. I have told you over and over again that death alone will part you and me. A day might come and that is sure to dawn, when living in your happy home with your husband you might wish—yes, even you, Thriti, might wish—to take up a smart young hussy for your attendant to do your bidding, run your errands, make up your dress and to knit and needle, but so long as there is life in this old carcase of mine, I will not leave you."

"Candida," said Jal, "when Thriti takes on like that, you know, I make it a point to run her down. But I cannot do it to-day; for I am so uneasy myself.—No, no, don't say a word, ayah. It has nothing to do with the little sickness I had yesterday. It is an uneasiness, a sort of a fear, which I cannot shake off. But come, Thriti, all this is, I suppose, a freak of idle brains. The best thing is to occupy them, as our headmaster says. Come, I'll read to you, Thriti, Candida will prepare our bath. And you, Thriti, shall stroke Lizzy's hair. Rosy, put Thritibai's favourite into her lap."

The favourite, which was a poodle, taking her cue as it were from Jal jumped on to her mistress's lap. Thus comfortably settled Jal read out the story of—Fredoon and His Philosophy."

CHAPTER XXIV

FREDOON AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

" I'll give thee armour to keep off that word,
Adversity's sweet milk, philosophy.
To comfort thee, though thou art banished."

SHAKESPEARE.

FREDOON and Freany lived in Teheran, the principal city of Persia—the land of our ancestors. They were born in the same year and had lived and grown up like twins and meant to deliver up together their '*ravans*' or souls to Him who gave them. They were matched and mated by Dame Nature who bad intended them as it were for each other.

Fredoon was poor in the worldly sense of the word but rich in the learned lore. When only sixteen, he was declared fit to sit on the councils of the *Anjuman.* In the olden Persian days, the *Anjuman* was an assembly of doctors, savants and law-g ivers. In those days, when most people lived by their sword, Fredoon lived by his pen. He preferred to spill the black fluid on paper rather than the red one on the battle-field. He was a poet and an author. This profession was then as now anything but lucrative. Freany had often tried to persuade Fredoon to lay down his pen and to exchange it for the sword. Fredoon, however, insisted that he would always carry on his battles on the field of paper with his pen and win such fame and fortune thereby as could never be won at the point of the sword. So there the matter ended ;—Fredoon writing poems and prose and making just enough to make both ends meet.

There was a time when Fredoon was engaged in writing a great epic. He worked late and early. Freany would often sit

up with him when he was burning his midnight lamp and would not go to bed until overpowered by Morpheus. This made her ill. A skilful *hakim* or physician attended on her in her illness. This good old man, who was childless, had taken a great liking for this couple and spent hours in their company. He often advised Fredoon, if he had any regard for his health not to overwork himself. Whilst Fredoon was steadily poring head downwards over what he penned, the *hakim* would look steadily into his eyes for minutes.

"Fredoon," he suddenly exclaimed one day, "do not your eyes get tired? Do not clouds ever gather round them? How do you act when they do?"

Fredoon, who had looked up in surprise to the no little wonderment of Freany, replied that on such occasions he set aside his work and dipped his orbs in cold.

Without more ado the *hakim* rose from his seat, snatched the pen from Fredoon's hands, thrust it and the paper aside and said in a peremptory tone: "Well then, young man, if you don't wish the clouds to permanently overclould your orbs, rise, wash them with this solution and go to bed. If you take my advice, bid farewell to these friends of yours whom you must now take to be your mortal foes."

Surgeons and surgery there were none in those days, and no spectacles. All the available skill was suited to the times. Fredoon went stone-blind. Even the old *hakim's* skill could avail him nothing. He had written verses on blindness but he never thought a day would dawn when he would have to compose verses on his own darkness. He could write verses and sell them. He could give those who may choose to have them, lines and thoughts accumulated in his mental store.

On the principle of misfortune never coming single the *hakim* died—died as poor as he had lived, for his was a life of charity. He never applied ointment or made wounds and healed them for the sake of money. He only took to bestow. So whilst the one was buried in a natural tomb the other was entombed as it we rein

a living grave. Freany's illness swallowed up all their savings. They sold off one thing after another. Even his finished manuscripts could get him nothing. His wife led him to the houses of all those who pretended to be book-worms and patrons of book-lore and invariably came away disappointed. One or two there were, who offered Fredoon a handsome return for some of his writings if he would give up all claims to them and allow them to pose as the makers thereof. These offers were of course declined ;—the result being that the wolf was soon at the door.

The bonds of affection are known even to break through the barriers of delicacy. Freany suggested that Fredoon should comit piecemeal to paper small bits of his valuable stock of poems and philosophy, his great sayings and grand observations and that they should sell them for a *derem* [1] each on market-days. Fredoon thus became as it were a vendor of philosophy, pert sayings and pithy observations. It was a pitiful but simple sight to see the young wife boldly pushing her way through the motley crowd in the bazaar where itinerant vendors of wearing apparel, crockery, trinket and trumpery exibited their ware and plied their trade. The newcomers with their respectable looks and polished manners were thorns in their sides and they left no stone unturned to scare them away. Seeing, however, that their only ware or mercantile commodity was scraps of paper, they allowed them to be there on sufferance.

It was not an unusual sight for curiosity-mongers to exchange their *derems* for the small paper balls, only to throw them away or crush them under feet for want of brains to understand their contents. The deceased *hakim's* nephew, who was of a contemplative turn of mind and a book-worm to boot, a great reader and a great thinker, but who read only for his own delectation and buried his thoughts in his own bosom, happened to pass by the vendor and heard the plaintive voice of Freany crying out, " Will you not buy

[1] A small Persian coin.

our viands, Sir ? One single viand will give you vitality ! Read and rectify ! Consider and improve ! Great thoughts lead to great ends ! Only a *derem* for each ! Only a *derem* ! Buy our philosophy pills ! They will cure all mental ailments and purge your mind of all impurities ! They are simply matchless ! It's only blind Fredoon that can produce such philosophy ! Read and benefit ! Only a *derem* ! Only a *derem* ! "

" What meanest thou, my good dame ? " asked Noshirvan—for that was the name of the *hakim's* nephew. " Methinks this is hardly a place for philosophers or for thinkers either. Your husband—for I take the blind man to be such—has evidently seen good days and you must be fishes out of water here. Well, well, here are ten *derems.* Let me have five of those precious paper balls of yours."

Fredoon handed him ten pills, whilst his wife took the *derems.*

" There, there," said Noshirvan, " take these five back. You can sell them to someone else."

" Nay, Sir," remonstrated Freany, " even in penury we wish to preserve our just pride and never accept *backshees.*[1] Either take all the ten pills or let me return you five *derems.*"

" So be it," said Noshirvan, " mayhap I shall go home and read them." " Poor dear! Poor dear ! " he muttered as he pushed his way through the crowd. " I wish uncle *Hakim* Hormuzd were alive to look at them."

Had he swallowed the pills instead of thrusting them in a corner of his capacious pocket or had he known the intimacy that existed between the vendor of philosophy and his deceased uncle, he would have said, " I wish Uncle Hormuzd were alive ; for he would never have allowed this matchless couple to trudge as they did now." Why, he would have carried the couple triumphantly to his house and feasted them on ' nan and kababs' [2] with accompaniment of ruby wine.

[1] Deserved or undeserved gratification or reward ; a gift.

[2] Rolled bread and minced meat balls.

Noshirvan went home and never thought either of the pair or their pills until one day whilst searching in his pocket for a lost ring his hands touched the rolled-up pieces of paper. Immediately the poor couple's sorry looks and mournful plight haunted him for his neglect. He took out the crumpled pieces and gently unfolded them.

"Avan! Avan! My *sherbet*." [1] Whilst his lips sipped the sweet juice, his eyes gulped the contents of the paper pieces.

(1)

"When the pious soul endeavoureth to sever itself from its carcase only to fly into the arms of its Giver, what carest thou if thou die on a throne or on the bare earth?"

(2)

"Mix thou, O monarch, mercy with justice even as the great *Hakim* Hormuzd operated and healed."

(3)

"The glow of glory is mightier than the gild of gold. Why then crave for the one at the expense of the other?"

(4)

"Eyes are the centre of everything; eyes are the cause of all mischief and woe. It is idle to blame a man's heart or a man's mind. It is the eyes that give and receive the touch. Their sense is first affected; theirs is the sin; and they communicate it to the other senses of thought and feeling."

(5)

"I pity my poor heart that suffers so much for the sin of my eyes. What a plague is my heart, I ask? The eyes commit a sin,—they behold a sweet face; and the heart recalling it suffers."

(6)

"The heart is a slave to the eyes; and my suffering heart tormenting me makes me a bondman to itself."

(7)

"Eyes had and have their part in the tragedies and comedies of love."

[1] A sweet drink made of lime juice and sugar or other ingredients.

(8)

"Of cruel heart and eyes I long complain ;
What see mine eyes my heart recalls again.
I would I have a dagger short and bright,
To tear mine eyes and free my heart of pain."

(9)

"Of the Has-Beens there are many,
Of the Ne'er-Was more by far ;
The Going-to-Be are legion ;
But how scarce are those that Are ?"

(10)

"Speaking without thinking
Is shooting without aiming."
"Be fit to live that you may be fit to die."

"*Shabbash !* Praise be to Allah ! Am not I a greater blind than Fredoon ? For it's he and no one else ! There was a blind before my eyes which the blind man has removed. To think that I should have been so callous as not even to cast a glance or lay a stress over the great store that I carried in my pocket ! What must they have felt ? What should I feel if He decide to deprive me of light ? I must hurry ; I must reward and relieve. I shall sit at Fredoon's feet and drink at the fountain of his wisdom, shine by his thoughts and revel in the richness of his luxurious dainties. Many would call Fredoon poor. I say he is richer than the richest ;—richer in the wealth of learning and erudition, richer in the possession of a matchless wife. I have written, I have sung ; and yet how low I sink in comparison !"

He rose, put on his long-flowing Persian robe, his silken *cummerband*,[1] his graceful *faeta*[2] and his *makhmal*[3] slippers and without a second thought walked out of the house. He went to the bazaar

[1] Waist-band.

[2] A graceful band wound in the shape of a turban round the head.

[3] Velvet.

and was told that the couple were not seen there for a full week and more. He obtained their address and repaired thither.

There, with her head buried in her arms, her long-flowing and beautiful hair all dishevelled and shedding tears of bitter woe, was Freany. The thick carpet spread over the ground drowned the noise of the visitor's footsteps. Noshirvan stood transfixed to the spot. He was in doubt as to whether he should disturb this Madonna in mourning. He decided to wait. When she did raise her head she accosted him kindly. Taking him to be Fredoon's friend, she begged of him to be seated on a *takya*[1] and to make himself completely at home.

He told her that he was *Hakim* Hormuzd's nephew and reminded her of the day on which he was at the bazaar and bought the ten paper balls from them. All this while he was looking and wondering at the great beauty and the glorious outlines of her face and figure. He had discovered new beauties in them and was blaming himself for being blind to them at the first interview. Could he ever make this Madonna his own ? He had never thought of any woman in that light before. Would she accept him ? His mind misgave him. "No," he thought, "she would not ;—I cannot be so fortunate."

"Alas, Sir," she said, "you have come to see Fredoon; but you will see him in this world no more. He is gone to his right place in Heaven and is gracing the assembly of God. His fellow-men did not appreciate his worth or virtues : the angels will. I am waiting to follow him and pray to God to take me into His great mercy."

"But may I know what you propose to do with yourself, *banoo*?[2] Have I your permission to be of service to you in this great hour of your sorrow ? One of Fredoon's great thoughts tells me that he had a great admiration for my uncle *Hakim* Hormuzd and I love those who loved him."

"Alas, Sir ! *Hakim* Hormuzd was the only friend we had in our days of downfall. He often spoke to us of your travels. Whilst

[1] Pillow. [2] Lady.

you were a wanderer over the world he was a daily wayfarer at our house. He shared in our humble cheer and partook of our miseries. Why, he made them his own. It goes to my heart to think that we should not have known you and that you should have passed us by as strangers when we met in the bazaar. For me nothing is left in this life. I am practically no more. I can provide for my wants until this wretched body and soul hold together."

"*Banoo*, if you deign not to accept anything at my hands, at least you will let me comfort and console you. You will let me be the medium of the Lord's bounty. You have in your possession the written manuscripts of Fredoon's great thoughts and Fredoon's philosophy. They are a wealth in themselves and I shall pay any price you may please to put on them. That will make you independent for life; for it is the greatest inheritance Fredoon could have left you."

"Manuscripts! Wealth! Independence!" she said as if speaking more to herself than to anyone else. "Haven't I told you, saheb, that I care not for these? I only live on the wealth of his memory. I live only to follow in his wake. I look at his *tasbir*,[1] live in the greatness of his heart and head and in the glory of his great virtues. The manuscripts never brought him the fame or fortune that he so richly deserved. They shall, therefore, live and die with me. No eyes except mine shall fall on them."

"Live and die with you, *banoo*! Far be it from me to wound your just pride and prejudice. Bound am I to respect your grief and to deplore your grievances. Sympathy, such as mine is, cannot be deeper. But it would surely be the height of injustice not to let the great store of learning that your husband has left behind him, to see the light of day."

"Alas, Sir! It is now too late to go back. Kneeling before my husband's remains, which have been exposed according to our wont to the burning rays of *Aftab*[2] on yonder high hill, I swore in the

[1] Likeness. [2] Sun.

sight of the Almighty that come what may those who came to scoff at my husband should never remain to praise him now. What they denied to him in life, they have no right to give him during his defunct. It seemed to me, Sir, when I took that oath that my husband's calm and placid face which was even calmer in death smiled at me sweetly and approvingly. Something tells me that Allah will let the presentiment of coming death creep to my mind before it overtakes me. When it does come I shall tear the manuscripts to pieces and bury them underneath the earth of that high hill, which so nobly supports my husband's remains. It has been arranged that I should lie by him and whilst we dry and wither above, the scraps shall crumble and wither below."

CHAPTER XXV

THE MANOEUVRE

"There's death in the cup—so beware!
Nay, more—there is danger in touching;
But who can avoid the fell snare?"

BURNS.

"WHAT do you think of these words:—'Eyes are the centre of everything: theirs is the sin'?" asked Jal of Thriti when the story had ended.

"Why," answered Thriti, "there is so much in common amongst all the blind. The blind live in a world of their own. I am almost beginning to see what the blind see but the seeing do not. Just think, Jal, so many things have happened since Papa's death, some great, some small; so many mishaps have happened to us and so many bid fair to occur. Events apparently small may end in catastrophes. Fredoon had his philosophy, which whilst he lived brought him nothing; after his death it would have brought his wife a fortune. Now that I bethink me, Jal, I am much more lucky. With little or no qualifications, there are people who are willing to give me a lift and to oblige me."

"But was Freany right in entombing his manuscripts?" asked Jal.

"Yes—No," said Thriti. "Yes—from her own point of view: No—from the point of view of Noshirvan who wanted to buy up the manuscripts, from the point of view of students and thinkers and from the point of view of the name and fame, which when too late to benefit by, Fredoon would have won. But all the same it was a great sacrifice, almost a martyrdom, on the part of the wife, for ten to one

the sale of the manuscripts would have brought her comfort, nay, even affluence, for the remainder of her earthly existence."

"Now that you tell me, Thriti, that there is so much in common among all the blind, what if you get some one to lead you when that some one and you become one in the future? Why should Jamshed not lead you? In the story I just read out to you it was the fair sex that led the sterner one. In your case it will be more in the order of things—I mean, the sterner sex leading the fair sex."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Thriti.

"Impossible! Thriti," returned Jal. "Impossible in the case of the man you have promised to marry but all possible in the case of the one who wishes to marry you. A gentleman is more genteel at times than the gentler sex and so will..."

At this moment there was a gentle knock at the door;—so gentle that it had to be repeated over and over again before it could draw attention. It seemed as if the knocker was afraid of being detected or overheard. Thriti forgetting that she was blind sprang to her feet and going straight to the door threw it open. In walked Roshan shaking all over with fright.

"You here, so soon, Roshan?" cried the brother and sister in a breath. "What ails you? Why, you are feverish. Come, come, lay this burden aside, stretch yourself in that sofa; tell us the cause of this abrupt return from school."

There was very little to tell. As the reader is aware, though it was Roshan's birthday she had been ordered out to school. Whilst there, she felt faint and giddy; the schoolmistress pressed her to return home and walking all the way under the burden of the satchel she felt slightly feverish.

"Fever or no fever," said Jal, "you shall remain here for the day. Come what may, Thriti, she shall not stir from this room until evening. That cruel mother of hers will slay her alive if she see her."

They had just finished speaking and put Roshan into an inner

room when there was another knock at the door. This time it was Jal that opened it, and O wonder of wonders! It was Meherbanoo's servant. He came with a present of fish, *dahi*[1] and *sev*,[2] in honor of Roshan's birthday. He said that the baisahebs upstairs would be very pleased, nay, obliged, if Thriti and Jal would dine with them.

As strange as it was singular. Yet neither Thriti nor Jal could find it in them to acquiesce. They made their excuses, such as they could;—not taken their bath, not dressed, not fit for table, not feeling well and so on. They tipped the servant and returned him with a bagful of apologies to the mighty mesdames.

After the servant had left, Jal and Roshan who were never tired of speaking to each other busied themselves looking over the album and discussing the looks and merits of the family ancestry. Thriti came out into the front room, opened her cupboard and was just engaged in arranging the things within with the help of her old ayah, when—lo! ting-ring went the small door bell. The ayah looked through the door apertures, which served as peepholes and recognized Sherbanoo. Quick as lightning she went in and taking Jal by the hand pushed him out of the inner room to the no little amazement of Roshan and closed the door on her. The front door was then thrown open and really and truly it was Baisaheb Sherbanoo that walked in.

"O Thriti, O Jal, why are you so stuck up? Why won't you condescend to take pot luck with us? Ardeshir and Erach are not here and we feel so lonely. I have come to invite you personally."

Jal, boy as he was, had no inclination or intention to save other people's faces. Boy-like he exclaimed, "but, Sherbanoo, you forget you are counting without the host;—I should say without the guest of the day, Roshan, whose birthday you are about to celebrate. I was at the window when satchel by her side she walked out to school."

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[1] Curdled milk. [2] Macaroni or vermicelli.

"O, tush ! you are harping on the same old tune, Jal. You know my mother is very strict and so am I. We both like regularity and punctuality. Roshan's is just the age to break children into harness. When she is out of frock she will be too old to mend or mould."

Jal would have involved himself in a bad dispute but for the old ayah who came to the rescue.

"Ba, dear boy, be quiet ; it does not behove you to raise disputes on such a day. It is children's duty to obey their parents. If they are not refractory it is none of our business to make them so."

In this the ayah was supported by her protége.

"Jal dear, please do go and dine with them. I beg of you to do so ; there's a dear good boy ! Sherbanoo, we are so much beholden to you for this kindness. Jal shall certainly go. But please excuse me. You know I am so awkward. You see I have not yet bathed. I am so so shabby; not at all fit for company."—And here Thriti tried to laugh but it died on her lips.

Jal was obedient and carried out his sister's behest. When they had gone out of the room, Thriti and her ayah put their heads together to find out the cause of so much courtesy, the old one rummaging the recesses of her old brains and the young one searching the corners of that valuable repository the head ; but all in vain.

"Thritibai," said the ayah after some time, "the pot over the stove must be boilin g over. I must go and see it."

In her hurry she clean forgot to close the front door which had all this while stood ajar. Before the ayah had time to return, a female figure, which Thriti could not of course see, walked in carefully and timidly, and after looking about to see that nobody was watching her as carefully approached the cupboard, removed a smal l box, which looked like a jewel case, from under the folds of her *sari*, thrust it in a *chorkhana* [1] which happened to be open, and without

[1] Secret drawer in a cupboard.

essaying to close it gently and quietly tripped out of the doorway leaving Thriti no wiser as to what had happened.

"O, ayah, I feel so faint with thinking of the cause of that girl's visit. Some mischief is surely a-brewing," said Thriti when the ayah came into the room again.

"O, *chhokri*," returned the ayah, "why is that door open? Who opened it? Did you let anybody in?" Then remembering herself and Thriti's condition she quieted down, closed the door, drew Thriti close to herself and begging her pardon for her own irritability and setting it down to the score of age, she tried to assure her that nobody could have entered and gone out unnoticed within the few minutes that she was away.

Later on Jal returned all in a huff, declined peevishly to answer Thriti's questions, said he would do so by and by, and straightway went in and was soon enough chatting with Roshan.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE VICTIMS OF VILLAINY

" *The breath*
Of accusation kills an innocent name,
And leaves for lame acquittal the poor life,
Which is a mask without it."

SHELLEY.

THIS brings us down to the day on which Bahadurshah's chauffeur carried news to him of the panic at Thriti's house and to the subsequent event of Mr. and Mrs. Bahadurshah's sudden departure thither. It was at this juncture that we had perforce to break the thread of our story and it is here that we must resume it.

On the day that followed Roshan's birthday, certain information was laid at the nearest police station by Meherbanoo and Sherbanoo and Erach against Jal and Thriti. A search warrant was applied for and granted. This explains the cause of the panic and the presence of Police Superintendent Mr. Macdermott and the Mahomedan detective at Thriti's house.

The loss of her eyes contributed in no small measure to Thriti's consternation. Were it not that her friends were by and did their level best to rally her she would have broken down completely. The Police Superintendent had a duty to perform but he did it with a delicacy and grace which are rarely put down to the credit of a policemen. He even went so far out of his way as to assure Thriti and Jal after the search was over that appearances were in many cases deceitful ; that circumstantial evidence not infrequently is misleading and that he doubted not things would come round well in the end. He must, he said, arrest them and keep them at the police

station until they were liberated on bail. He would place them before the Magistrate that very day, who he felt sure would grant bails as a special case. So Jal and Thriti had to go with Mr. Macdermott first to the police station and thence to the Magistrate's court the same day.

The next day the following appeared in the Bombay papers under the head of Police Courts :—

At the Mazagaon Police Court yesterday, Police Superintendent Mr. Macdermott appeared before Mr. Minocheher Khurshed Modi, the Second Presidency Magistrate, with Khan Bahadur Mahomed Juseb of the Detective Force, and laid certain information on behalf of Bai Meherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal and her daughter Sherbanoo against one Jal Feroze Patel, a boy of about fifteen, and his sister Thriti, aged about twenty, charging the former with trespass and theft and the latter with aiding and abetting in the offence and receiving and retaining stolen property. The complainants and the accused were present in the court. The Superintendent said that the complainants lived at Grant Road, a short distance from the police station. On the 4th of the current month they called at the police station and lodged certain written information against Jal and Thriti, the elder complainant's nephew and niece and the younger one's cousins who lived on the ground floor of the same house and applied in writing for a search and arrest. Thereupon Mr. Macdermott accompanied by Khan Bahadur Mahomed Juseb went to Miss Patel's lodgings and examined the cupboard in which she kept her valuables, etc. The box of jewels which the Superintendent showed to the Magistrate and which the complainants recognized as their own was found concealed in a *chorkhana* or secret drawer of the cupboard. The Superintendent further said that the search was carried out and the box found in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Bahadurshah who resided at Malabar Hill, Miss Macgregor and Mr. Jamshed Aga, an advocate of the High Court. During the search, the Superintendent said he must say

that the brother and sister behaved as people of genteel birth alone do. They were quiet and dignified, offered no opposition and pleaded their utter ignorance and absolute innocence of the offence. Had the box been not found in the *chorkhana*, he the Superintendent could never have believed young Thriti and Jal to be guilty of the offence. The Magistrate remarked that the Superintendent must remember that he was there to prosecute and should not try to soften the charge. Mr. Macdermott proceeded to say that there was not the slightest doubt that the box was found in Miss Patel's cupboard, but he could not say how it came to be there. For aught he knew it may be a present from the complainants to the accused. It was for the Magistrate, the Superintendent said, after hearing the prosecution and the defence, to decide whether the box was abstracted by Jal and retained by Thriti.

The complainants' written statement was then read out. In it the senior complainant had said that the 3rd of the current month was her younger daughter Roshan's birthday. On the morning of that day she had sent her servant Rama with a present of sweets etc. to Miss Thriti Patel and invited th em to go up and share the birthday repast with them. This invitation not having been accepted, her daughter Sherbanoo the second complainant at her bidding went downstairs to invite them personally. Thriti would not go but Jal did so a few minutes after. Early that day they had occasion to open the cupboard in which they kept their jewels and valuables; and setting aside a small case, which contained the ornaments they intended to wear that day, they left the door open and came out in the front room where they saw Jal and welcomed him. A few minutes after the repast was over, leaving Jal alone in the dining-room, they went to the cook-room to give certain orders for the day. On their return they found Jal up and ready to depart. He was pressed to remain but said he could not do so without offending his professors. They subsequently learnt that

it being a Thursday the St. Xavier's College which the accused attended was closed. After Jal's departure their attention was drawn to the door of the cupboard. They looked for the case of ornaments and found that it was not there. They felt sure it must have been abstracted by some one from the open cupboard. They suspected Jal with whose behaviour they had very grave reasons to be dissatisfied for some time past. They had no reason to suspect their servant Rama who was the only servant that was allowed to enter the room in which the cupboard containing the valuables stood and that too during cleaning hours only, which were late in the afternoon. They suspected Thriti of aiding and abetting in the offence. She was now spoiling the boy as their parents had done before. Besides she (Thriti) having lost her parents and gone blind had been reduced to serious straits and must want money. They the complainants had to make a hard fight with themselves before they could apply for the search warrant. It was in the interest of the accused themselves, however, that they at last made up their mind to do so. They were lone ladies and had no body to advise them.

The Magistrate here remarked that the complainant could not be a widow, as she did not wear the widow's weeds and enquired if her husband did not live with her and help her. The husband, Mr. Ardeshir who was present in the court, came forward at these words and said that he did live under the same roof with his wife but that unluckily his wife always took him to be dead, and though he was invariably present at the house in flesh and blood his wife always marked him absent in the home muster-roll. This evoked a loud laugh, which could not be suppressed until the *chaprasi*[1] cried '*cheep, cheep*,' 'order order'.

The written complaint then proceeded to say that the complainants took it that if the search were successful and if they got back

[1] A court orderly.

their valuables the matter would end there. As it turned out, however, it having been laid in the hands of the police, a police prosecution had to ensue.

Mr. Macdermott then said that he had been asked by the complainants to bring to the notice of His Worship that Mr. Jamshed Aga, advocate, who had appeared on behalf of the accused, was betrothed to one of the complainants—Bai Sherbanoo, that there was great friction between the parties and the complainants would be glad if the Magistrate could see his way to call upon the accused to place their defence in some other hands. The Magistrate expressed his surprise that the complainants should have preferred such a request. Mr. Aga was a very honourable member of the Bar and quite within his rights in undertaking the defence.

Mr. Aga then requested the Magistrate to grant witness summonses against the following :—Mr. Ardeshir Dalal and his daughter Roshan, Mr. and Mrs. Bahadurshah, Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji, Miss Macgregor, Ayah Candida and Mr. Rustom Delaver. The Magistrate asked if the senior complainant's husband did not intend to depose on her behalf. He the Magistrate presumed that he was there on behalf of his wife and elder daughter. The husband replied that His Worship's presumption was not correct. He intended to depose on behalf of the accused. He would have liked to be neutral and to depose on neither side but his conscience dictated to him otherwise. If he could help it he would not depose in any court of law on this benighted earth. He would only leave it to the Lord to decide between himself and his family on the day of universal justice and mercy. There was another prolonged and hearty laugh, which required a louder *cheep*, *cheep* and a threat from the Magistrate to clear the court before it could be subdued.

Mr. Aga then said that the father and daughter would be most important witnesses iu the case. This exasperated the complainants. The senior complainant so far forgot herself as to say that Mr. Aga

was mad. Roshan was her daughter, she was under age, and Mr. Aga had no right to ask her to depose on their side. The second complainant said that it was a fraud, a vulgar trick, a stratagem. His Worship ordered the complainants on pain of being charged with contempt of court to hold their peace. He then asked Mr. Aga to finish what he had to say.

"Your Worship," said the advocate, "I have pondered over this matter deeply and anxious as I am to save Miss Roshan from the displeasure of her mother and sister, of which we all had a foretaste here, I cannot dispense with her evidence, as it will, I feel sure, throw important light and assist the court materially in unravelling the mystery of this marvellous prosecution. I would exhort the court to impress it on the complainants to let the young lady remain at their house under the eye of her father, and not to molest her or treat her cruelly or unmercifully." He further said that he was in a position to show that Miss Roshan was anything but a favourite of the mother and the daughter, that she had all along been very harshly treated and that the prospect of her saying things on the side of the accused might aggravate the roughness of the treatment that was usually meted out to her. His Worship said that all he could do at present was to order witness summonses to be issued against Mr. Ardeshir, Miss Roshan and the other parties named by Mr. Aga. There was no charge of cruelty or rough treatment of Roshan then before him and he could not therefore make any order in that matter. He did not think respectable ladies of the birth and position of Bai Meherbanoo and Bai Sherbanoo could so far forget themselves as to ill-treat the child. But if otherwise, the father could exercise his authority and protect her until the storm had blown over. Mr. Ardeshir was heard to murmur that if the Magistrate knew the two women as well as he Ardeshir did he would never have said what he had just said. It was all he could do to guard his own skin and the responsibility of Roshan's safety would surely crush him. There was

something in the man's look so piteous that pity took the place of laughter.

Bails were then applied for by Mr. Aga on behalf of Jal and Thriti. After some discussion they were granted by the Magistrate under the peculiar circumstances of the case. Bahadurshah and Mehelooji stood substantial bails. The case was then adjourned.

So ended the newspaper reports, which ran under specially big and sensational headings.

CHAPTER XXVII

PROSECUTION OR PERSECUTION ?

" What mighty magic can assuage
A woman's envy and a bigot's rage? "

GRANVILLE.

WHEN Mr. Modi's court sat on Saturday following it was crowded to the very door. At the last hearing he had stated that this would be the first case he would take in hand that day and that he would give it a full day's hearing. Full two hours before he took his seat, throngs of anxious spectators, curiosity-mongers and idlers began to come in ; and when the time for the hearing arrived there was room for no more. A fever of excitement and anxiety prevailed ; and there was a continuous buzz all about the place like a disturbed wasps' nest or a rookery on a huge scale. But this was only short-lived; for when the proceedings commenced there was a breathless silence all round.

After Mr. Macdermott and Khan Bahadur Juseb, came in Meharbanoo and Sherbanoo. They were in close converse with one Mr. Khanderao Madherao Khatkhate, a Maratha Hindu pleader of His Majesty's High Court of Judicature, who expected to be dubbed a Rao Bahadur these ten long years and more, looked for the welcome news in the papers every succeeding New Year's Day and King's Birthday, and being disappointed hoped and hoped and hoped in vain for the best. To his mind the Rao Bahadurship was a stepping-stone to the Magisterial Bench, on which vacancies occurred now and then. Now and again he cast a furtive and envious glance or two at Mr. Modi, who though a Parsi and much his junior, had the good fortune to ascend the

Bench. Mr. Khatkhate never could think that any one, much less a junior, could be better fitted for the Bench than himself, particularly if he belonged to a nation other than his own. So he put down every senior or junior's rise to the credit of petticoat or back-stair influence or wire-pulling. He had so much faith in the efficacy of these ingredients that he never missed a single opportunity of giving them a trial. As ill-luck would have it, however, the petticoat peached, the stairs proved slippery or the wire broke; and Mr. Khatkhate's hopes remained unrealised. The present case being a most interesting one, Mr. Khatkhate thought, it would bring him name and fame and leave him only one step farther from the Bench and two from the Rao Bahadurship. So he undertook to lead the prosecution almost for the honour of it. If he won the case, which he felt sure of doing, he would get the considerable sum of rupees fifty for his trouble. If he did not, it would only be because the Magistrate was prejudiced and favoured the accused. These things did happen, Mr. Khatkhate said, for after all Magistrates are but human beings.

Come what may, he had determined on this occasion to be at his best and to make an impression. He was clean-shaven. His head seemed as if it had just come out from a boiling-pan. Not a vestige of hair was within nose-range or adorned his face. Even the eyebrows were carefully shaved. His dress consisted of a second-hand tailcoat, a *surval* or close-fitting pants and a black cap which seemed to be a compromise between an Indian *topee* and a felt hat but which looked more like the latter. A worn-out shirt and jacket and an antiquated little tie, the colour of which it was difficult to distinguish, formed the inside adornments. Country-made boots and white stockings, much smeared and service-worn, graced the somewhat uncouth length of his long legs and feet.

Thriti, Jal, Ardeshir, Magdalene, Mr. Bahadurshah, Roshan, and Shirin came in with Mr. Aga, the advocate. They looked resigned but resolute. Their appearance made a deep impression on the

spectators and on the court, who could not remove their eyes from them. Something told them that the young brother and sister were about to be immolated at the altar of family feud and foibles.

Roshan was a sight to see and admire. Slender, tall and well-featured, she had a grace and dignity of her own. On this occasion she was dressed in a plain but elegant blue silken *sari* with a border to match, the *sor* or upper end of which set off the beauty of her head and face and gracefully relieved part of her jet-black silken hair, which it would have been cruelty to cover up. There were traces of recent tears on her cheeks, which seemed to be well under her control now. Her gait was erect and her proud lips resolutely pursed. One could read in her face tender commiseration for injured innocence, mournful sorrow for the sins of the misguided and a strong determination to say the truth for the sake thereof.

The female group on the side of the defence stood out in glaring contrast to the two women on the side of the prosecution. The contrast was so vivid that it reminded one of the variegated opinion expressed by poets of the character of this tender part of humanity. Some have called women faithful, some unfaithful; some loyal, some disloyal; some moral, some immoral; some selfish, some selfless; some harsh, some gentle; some devoted, some fickle; some grateful, some ungrateful. Some have said that woman is the prop and pride of life; others have pronounced that she is the bane of life. Luckily for humanity there is the balance of power and equilibrium in the quality and character of women as in all things else in nature.

"Your Worship," said Mr. Macdermott, "Mr. Khatkhate has been engaged by Mrs. Dalal and her daughter on their behalf."

The Magistrate's attention was for the first time drawn to that learned limb of the law.

"Mr. Khatkhate," he said, "you have forgotten to remove your head-dress, though you are in English costume."

That learned individual who had a peculiar twang in his speech and spoke a little like a Spaniard and more like a German and whose speech we do not wish to stultify, replied :

"I beg Yar Worrorshipful Worrorship's most aabject and aapologetic pardon. I am in mourning, Yar Worrorship. My *gharwalli* died a week ago. I have clean-shaved in accordance with religion. My head is baald ; and it would nat look nice to expose that to Yar Hanar's worrorshipful eyes."

"This is the first time I hear, Mr. Khatkhate, that you Hindus go into mourning for your landladies," said the Magistrate.

"Yar Worrorship, we cal our wives *gharwallis*." (Loud and uncontrollable laughter.)

"The court is sorry for your loss, Mr. Khatkhate ; but it must ask you to remove that thing on your head. All it can do is to allow you, if you so desire, to fold your *ooperna*[1] round your head."

There were peals of laughter, which were controlled with difficulty. Taking advantage of this, Mr. Khatkhate removed his cap and tied up the *ooperna* over his pate.

"Yar Worrorship," he then proceeded to say, "I have a request to make on behalf of these highly respectable, influential, and val-to-do ladies, before I proceed with the prasecution. My clients desire to have only five minutes' taak with the witness Roshanbai ; and Yar Worrorship will kindly make an arder to thiat effect."

"Miss Roshan," asked the Magistrate, "do you wish to see your mother in private ?"

Without a moment's hesitation, the witness replied in English in fine clear accents and intonation : "Sir, I do not. I think I had better not."

"You see, Mr. Khatkhate, Miss Roshan does not wish to talk to

[1] A long white cloth band usually thrown over the shoulders by Hindus, and flowing downwards to the knees.

her mother; and as she is here for the accused the court has no jurisdiction to force her to do so," said the Magistrate.

"Yar Worrorship," urged the man of law, "when you know al Yar Worrorship will change yar mind. A serias frad has been cancacted against these hanarable ladies. After the first hearing of the case vas over, Bai Meherbai's husband viary daaringly abscanded the witness Roshan and concealed her and himself in some place unknown to these highly hanarable ladies. Yar Worrorship, this is disgraceful and viary unfair to my clients."

"I would warn you, Mr. Khatkhate, not to take up the time of the court in this way. You should also be very careful in the choice of your words. As the complainant's husband and her daughter Roshan wish to depose on the other side, I think they were quite right in not giving the complainants an opportunity of talking them over."

Mr. Khatkhate thereupon opened the examination-in chief. Bai Meherbanoo was the first to be examined. The Parsi prayer-book—Avesta—was handed to her. She held it in her hand and swore to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, in the sight of God and man.

She was not a bad-looking woman. She was medium-sized. Her person was carefully preserved, as much as to say, see, don't I take care of it ? Her head was well-poised and erect ; her features good. Her face and mouth were alike so ; but they were hard-set and rigid such as bespoke firmness and resolve, selfishness and self-will, even in a bad cause. She had a good voice and spoke freely and unnerved. Her dress though somewhat showy was in keeping with her age. Altogether she was a woman difficult to read, especially for those who did not know her. Those who knew her knew well that her life was and would be one long and wrong regret for her marriage with good Mr. Ardeshir. It was not infrequently that she cursed her parents for it. Ardeshir was not the sort of husband

she would have picked out for herself ; she could have, she thought, made a better match.

Mr. Khatkhate asked the Magistrate if he could give a chair to the complainant. In support of his request he said she was an elderly and a high-born lady, very influential and very rich, and the Magistrate would kindly see his way to comply with his request. The Magistrate replied that he was very sorry he could not do so. The lady looked pretty strong and quite able to go through her evidence in a standing pose. Besides the court made no difference between silk and cotton.

Q.—Yar name ?

A.—Meherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal.

Q.—You know both the accused ?

A.—Yes, I have known them ever since they were babes. They are my sister's children.

Q.—Do they nat live in the same house with you ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—How lang ?

A.—For the last seven years and more.

Q.—Do you charge them any riant ?

A.—Yes, I have been charging them rupees twenty only for rooms, which are now fully worth rupees forty and more per month.

Q.—Have you nat been on good terms with them ever since they have lived with you ?

A.—Yes, for a long time ; but they have been trying to seek quarrel with me on one pretext or another ever since they have been asked to give up the rooms in my house.

Q.—So you have asked them to give up the rooms ; why ?

A.—Increasing expenses, dearness of food and living, the prospect of getting my daughters married and such like considerations have compelled me to give them notice to quit.

Q.—When vas the natice given to them ?

A.—Six months ago.

Q.—And why is it they have nat yet left ?

A.—Owing to my sister's death I have not been very pressing.

Q.—Does yar husband Mr. Ardeshir cantriboot to the household expenses ?

Mr. Jamshed Aga interposed that this question was irrelevant and that the Magistrate would kindly disallow it. The Magistrate said, Mr. Khatkhate might put the question in a different shape.

Q.—To whom does the house belang ? Does it belang to yar husband or is it jaint praperty ?

A.—It is my own property, handed to me by a distant relative of mine who had adopted me as a daughter.

Q.—Are you able to defray yar expenses independently of yar husband ?

A.—It is all I can do to do so.

Q.—Vat do you know of the 3rd day of the current month ?

A.—It was my daughter Roshan's birthday. We felt very lonely because of the absence of my husband and my little daughter Roshan who had perforce to go to school. We naturally did not like to dine alone on such a day ; and my daughter Shera pressing I sent my servant Rama to invite Thriti and Jal to dine with us. We had plenty of victuals ; and on such a day we did not like to throw them out of the window.

The Magistrate :—Why did you not give it to the beggars outside or send it to the Poor Parsis' *Dhurmshallah*[1] ? Are you not charitable ? (Loud laugh.)

Meherbanoo :—I hate beggars and cannot bear the sight of them.

The Magistrate :—Hatred is hateful ; it is a sin. Is it not ? (Peals of laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, my client is giating nar-

[1]Asylum for the poor.

vous at Yar Worrorship's remarks. She is nat aacustomed to atendance in cart.

The Magistrate :—Well, let her be used to it then.

Mr. Khatkhate :—So you sent yar servant Rama to invite Thriti and Jal ?

A —Yes ; and as they did not come my daughter Sherbanoo offered to go and invite them personally.

Q.—Did they accept the invitation then ?

A.—Thriti did not ; but Jal came up soon after.

Q.—Vat haapened then ?

A.—We dined,—Jal, Shera and I. After dinner Shera and I had occasion to go to the cook-room.

Q.—How lang vas it before both of you returned to the dining room ?

A.—About four or five minutes.

The Magistrate :—Did you look at your watch ?

A.—No ; but I can say so much time must have passed.

The Magistrate made a note of this.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Where vas Jal when you returned ?

A.—He was in the dining-room.

Q.—Sitting or standing ?

A.—Standing and preparing to leave.

Q.—Vat did he look like ? Vas he compased ?

A.—He looked very nervous and excited, said it was time for him to go to college and though pressed to stay insisted on leaving immediately.

Q.—Did you natice anything unusual in his person or demeanour ?

A.—Yes ; one of his coat-pockets looked puffed up and he had his right hand over it.

Q.—Did you suspect anything wrang then ?

A.—No ; not then. But it seems to me now that he had concealed our jewel-case in his coat-pocket.

The Magistrate :—Why could it not be a plaintain or an apple? Boyish appetite disdains them not. Mr. Khatkhate, were you not fond of them when you were a boy ? (Peals of laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yes, Yar Worrorship ; but I did not steal them.

The Magistrate :—But what is there to show that Jal being poor did not steal them ? (Loud laugh.)

Mr. Khatkhate then requested Mr. Macdermott to produce the case of valuables and to show it to the Magistrate.

The Magistrate to the witness :—What sort of coat had Jal on when he dined with you ?

A.—Rather an oldish-looking coat of dark merino, with side pockets.

The Magistrate here asked the *chaprasi* to ask Master Jal to step into the court-room. Then addressing the witness he inquired if the coat which Jal then wore was the same that he had put on on Roshan's birthday. The witness being confused looked at Mr. Khatkhate as if to read the reply in his face. At a warning look from the Magistrate Mr. Khatkhate turned away from his client. The witness then replied that it looked much like the same coat but that she was not sure. Mr. Aga suggested that the Magistrate would kindly allow the coat to be kept in the court, as he thought it would be of great use to him in the complainant's cross-examination. The Magistrate agreeing, Mr. Aga dispatched his servant to run to Jal's house and get another coat for him.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Vat made you think the cias vas stolen by Jal ? Why could it not be one of yar own men ?

The Magistrate :—Mr. Ardeshir, for instance. (Roars of laughter.)

A.—Our servants are old and trustworthy and have orders to enter the private apartments at particular hours of the day only.

The Magistrate :—Servants are after all but servants. Don't they break orders oftener than they obey them ? (Laughter again.)

Q.—When did you make up yar mind that Jal vas the culprit ?

Mr. Aga objected to this question. He urged that Mr. Khatkhate was practically putting the words in his client's mouth that Jal was the culprit. The Magistrate stated that he could not allow the question to be put.

Mr. Khatkhate here said that Meherbanoo's examination was over. Sherbanoo was then called in.

Her appearance and manners were quite her own. It is said that the apparel oft proclaims the man. This was true in Sherbanoo's case. But we would go a step further and say that it proclaims a woman's mind, manners and tastes, in a marked degree. Her dress was in anything but good taste. It showed as if she thought she was going to a wedding or to an at-home. She wore jewels to show that she was determined to empty not only her own jewel-cases but those of her mother to boot. Her raiments were gaudy. Her features were not naturally unattractive but artificial aids had rendered them so. There was something in her face that created repugnance, as much as to say please don't approach us, we would rather not have anything to do with you. In simpler dress, she would certainly have looked better and much less uninviting.

We must now record her examination.

Q.—Yar name ?

A.—Shera Dalal.

The Magistrate :—The complainant must give her full name. What is her father's name ?

A.—My own name is Sherbanoo. I always sign myself Shera Dalal.

The Magistrate :—But the court must know your full name. What is your father's name ?

A.—I don't call him my father.

The Magistrate :—But the court knows you have a father and the court must have his name.

A.—If the court knows it, why am I compelled to mention it ?

The Magistrate :—If you don't mention it, you will come in for contempt of the court and will be dealt with accordingly.

Mr. Khatkhate seemed as if he would say something to his client. But at a warning look from the Magistrate he abstained from doing so.

Sherbanoo being thus compelled said, "if you must have his name, well, it is Ardeshir."

The Magistrate :—Then I note that your full name is Sherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal. (The spectators here chuckled.)

Q.—You live with yar mother ?

A.—Yes ; from my birth. She has never let me out of her sight.

The Magistrate :—And you have never been out of her mind.

At this the second complainant became furious and looked daggers at the Magistrate, who smiled but did not say anything further.

Q.—Vat do you know of the 3rd day of the current month ?

The second complainant here related all that her mother had stated in reply to similar questions that were put to her by her vakil.

Q.—Vat were yar relations with the aacused until the afence vas committed ?

A.—Very friendly on our side ; very unfriendly on theirs.

Q.—Did you give them caz to be unfriendly ?

A.—None that I know of.

Q.—You are an aducated young lady ?

A.—Well, I suppose so.

The Magistrate :—She looks to be too too educated. (Laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate, taking this to be a compliment, said, " and viary palished too, Yar Hanar." (Loud laugh accompanied by a clapping of hands. *Chip, Chip,* from the *chaprasis.*)

" Over polished," said the Magistrate.

Q.—How were you received by the aacused when you went to invite them ?

Mr. Aga said the question was not quite relevant but the Magistrate allowed it.

A.—Not as I should have been.

The Magistrater:—This is no answer. The witness must be more clear.

The witness :—Am I bound to do so ? I am a lady. The court should be more courteous to me. It should not be hard on ladies.

The Magistrate :—But when ladies choose to go to court, the court has a duty to perform and perform it this court shall. It therefore orders you to answer your pleader's question more clearly.

The complainant stamped her fist on the rail of the witness-box so furiously that it broke her glass-bangles. But she answered without more ado.

" They received me haughtily; almost rudely."

The Magistrate :—Did they abuse you ?

The witness glared at the Magistrate.

A.—I think they did. But what they said was in such low tones that I did not catch the exact words.

The Magistrate reminded the witness that she was on oath and must be very careful as to all her statements.

Q.—Did they aaccept yar invitation ?

A.—Yes ; the boy did ; but the girl did not. She played the high lady with me.

The Magistrate :—Not so much as you do with the court. (The spectators were convulsed with laughter.)

Q.—Jal dined with you. Vat haapened then ?

The complainant here related all that her mother had said on the same subject.

Q.—Has there been any enmity between you and the aacused ?

A.—None on our side. It was all on theirs. They have always been jealous because they are not like us.

The Magistrate :—What do you mean by 'not like us' ?—As clever and gorgeous or as rich and proud ?

The complainant having kept quiet, the Magistrate said she must answer the question on pain of fine.

A.—I don't know.

The Magistrate repeated his warning.

A.—Not so well-behaved and good as ourselves.

Q.—Vat do you think is Mr. Aga's aabject in taking up the caz of the aacused ?

The Magistrate at once overruled the pleader.

Q.—Have you anything mar to say ?

The Magistrate :—It is for you to extract it from her.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, I have nothing mar to ask her.

The Magistrate :—Well, then I note that your examination of the second complainant is over.

The second complainant then breezed out of the witness-box as grandly as she had sailed in.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MR. KHATKHATE'S KHATPAT [1] : THE PROCEEDINGS PROCEED

"*The dulness of the fool is the whetstone of his wits.*"

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN the court sat again, it was even more crowded than before. A distinct and noticeable feature about it was the predominance of Parsi audience, which included a goodly number of the weaker vessel.

Wherever these Parsi weaker ones go, they carry grace and add but *eclat* to the assemblage. They are attractive and carry attraction in their train. Their presence carries charm, grace and dignity with it. Their dress, buoyancy and demeanour rivet attention. The only regrettable point about it is that of late they have taken to be here, there and everywhere. They rush in quite impervious to the danger of being crushed or hemmed in. It is not a wonder then to see them often so hemmed in as to be a spoil to ungentlemanliness and indecorum. There is not a meeting or a *tamasha*, a gathering or a lecture, that is without them. A Magistrate's court is hardly a place for courteous or courtly reception of the fair sex. In justice, however, to the female element to which we now refer, it may be said that the exceptional and unusual nature of the case was a justifiable excuse for its presence in Mr. Modi's court on that day.

Long before the court hour, and even after it, people of all communities, caste, colour and creed continued to invade the precincts of the court and its compound. The interest in the case was

[1] Originally meaning 'agitation,' hence any unreasonable talk or unsound arguments. A war of words.

considerably intensified; and the excitement engendered thereby had reached its climax.

Punctually at the hour of 11 A.M. the court-criers sent forth the usual warning-cry of *chip, chip*. The Magistrate's presence was then announced; and he took his seat under the overwrought and anxious eyes and the buzzing and humming of the all-expectant human bees. The proceedings then commenced. A crude and clumsy figure in front of the complainants and by the side of the legal members of the court, arose as clumsily and was about to say something when the Magistrate looked wonderingly at Mr. Macdermott and enquired where Mr. Khatkhate was and whether the complainants had put up another pleader in his stead. If his eyes did not deceive him, it was surely not Mr. Khatkhate. As a matter of fact, however, the figure on which the magisterial eyes had landed was that self-same learned individual in flesh and blood.

Before Mr. Macdermott could reply, that gentleman himself said:

"Yar Worrorship, I am aastanished that yar learned eyes should be so deceived. It is yar humble servant Khatkhate himself."

The Magistrate and the crowd were surprise-stricken. They did not know if to laugh or to cry. At last the Magistrate found words to say:

"O, then it's you, Mr. Khatkhate. I took it to be your ghost."

Peal upon peal of laughter. Even the Magistrate was a party to it. Even Mr. Khatkhate, not catching the pointed raillery involved in it, was led away and joined the merriment. When the convulsion was over, he managed to say, but not before the Magistrate had put up his folded kerchief to his lips to prevent a recurrence of the hilarious feeling:

"Yar Worrorship, I have adaapted two castooms. I usually

praactise in the civil carts, I mean the small cazes cart. This is the first time I have been in a criminal cart. I thiank the Lard that he has given me an aaportunity of aapearing before yar learned Worrorship."

I leave the reader to imagine the effect this singular speech had on the human contents of the court. Mr. Khatkhate was on this occasion dressed in a long old fashioned white coat and a white *dhotie* or loin cloth somewhat soiled. There were no stockings and no boots. Their place was taken by *jodas.*[1] As if to avenge himself on the Magistrate for compelling him to go bare-headed on the previous day, his learned head was environed in a big and cumbersome white *dupatta.*[2] To save his striking personality his curious-looking face had made fresh acquaintance with the razor.

The name of Mr. Erach Aspendiar Aga, one of the witnesses on the side of the complainants, was then called out. He was a middle-sized, thick-set, wheat-coloured man, dressed or rather over-dressed in up-to-date English costume. His thick black hair, which appeared to be specially trimmed for the occasion, was plumbed on to his precious pate with an extra doze of pomatum. His nose was corked ; his cheeks puffed ; and his face somewhat swollen, which indicated familiarity with strong drinks. His eyes were small, keen and cunning. There was something in him that at once repelled and rejected. Such was the individual ; and yet it was him that the highly placed and up-to-date Sherbanoo preferred to the model man Aga. It is one of God's own secrets, which reminds us of what the poet has said, that ' the proper study of mankind is man '. All that our experience has been able to scan is that a bad man generally prefers a bad woman and a bad woman a bad man, though it not infrequently happens that a bad man runs after a good woman and a bad woman entraps a good man.

[1] Country-made shoes.

[2] A long white band folded round the head to serve as a turban or *pugdi.*

But to come to the mighty man's munching verbiage. He told the Magistrate that though the witness was an educated man he was rather nervous and wanted the interpreter to help him. This was allowed, the witness's examination being conducted partly in the tongue of the ruling race and partly in that of the country which is Gujarati.

Q.—Yar name ?

A.—Erach Aspendiar Aga.

Q.—Vat is yar relationship to the aacused's pleader ?

The Magistrate :—Counsel, if you please, Mr. Khatkhate.

Mr. Khatkhate :—I beg Yar Worrorship's most aabject and aapologatic pardon ; I meant aadvokiat.

The Magistrate :—You should proffer your apology to that gentleman there and not to me.

The legal luminary was confused. He looked from the Magistrate to the counsel and from the counsel to the Magistrate. When he managed to say something it was drowned in the huge laughter that the occurrence evoked.

Q.—Vat is yar relationship to the aacused's counsel ?

A.—He is my cousin.

The Magistrate :—Are you related to the complainants ?

A.—Yes. The first complainant is my paternal aunt and the second complainant my cousin.

The Magistrate :—Are you related to the accused ?

A.—Yes. They are also my cousins.

The Magistrate :—Is there no further connection between you and the second accused Miss Thriti ?

The witness looked confused, but said, "No."

The Magistrate : —Witness, you should remember you are on oath here ; you know, I mean connection from a matrimonial point of view.

A.—Well, if you must have it—

The Magistrate :—You are disrespectful to the court. It is

not a question of my having it but it is a question of your having it out.

A.—I am betrothed to the second accused.

The Magistrate noted the above questions and answers.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Vat do you know of the third day of the current month ? Were you present at the complainants' house when the first aacused committed the thiaft ?

The Magistrate, correcting the pleader, said, 'is alleged to have committed the theft'.

A.—No, I was not. But I went there shortly after the accused left the complainants' quarters on that day and learnt all about it from the complainants.

Q.—And vat vas thiat al ?

The witness here related what the complainants had told him about the theft.

Q.—Vat vas yar feeling when you heard it ? Did you believe vat the complainants told you ?

A.—Yes, I believed every word of it. I was roused and exasperated. My temper was up.

The Magistrate :—Would you have killed the accused if you had got hold of him ? (Laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—Had you any doubt about the guilt of the aacused ?

A.—None whatever.

Q.—Why nat?

A.—Because my belief is my belief.

The Magistrate :—Just as my ship my order. Witness, you are insulting your pleader by not giving a direct answer to his question. I order you to give it.

A.—I believed it and do believe it, because they are ill-bred and ill-brought-up.

The Magistrate :—Why do you think them to be so ?

A.—Because I know and feel it.

The Magistrate :—What is your standard of education and

bringing-up? I don't ask about breeding, because the accused and you belong to the same family.

A.—The court is taxing my patience.

The Magistrate :—You are taxing the patience of the court by evading its questions. The court wants to tax the truth of your statements.

A.—My ideas of education and bringing-up are my own. How can I describe them?

The Magistrate :—Well, then, what is your own education?

A.—I ... I ... have studied upto the English Seventh Standard. I failed in the Matric.

The Magistrate :—Failure is no qualification. By whom were you brought up?

A.—I was brought up by my widowed mother.

The Magistrate :—Are not widowed mothers known for their over-partiality to their offsprings and for spoiling them?

The witness stamped his foot furiously on the ground but said nothing.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, the witness here is a viary good jiantliman but somevat nervous and excitable. If the cart keep questioning him it will spaail his case.

The Magistrate :—That's the court's business, Mr. Khatkhate. You forget you are insulting the court.

Mr. Khatkhate was about to ask a long pardon but the Magistrate stopped it.

Q.—You know the first complainant's husband?

A.—I think I am supposed to know him, especially as God has willed him to be my *fua*.[1] (Roars of laughter.)

The Magistrate :—But you can break His commandments and disown him. (Uncontrollable laughter.)

Q.—Is he not on viary biad terms with you and his wife and his elder daater? Does he nat hiarass them and you?

[1] The husband of one's paternal aunt.

Mr. Aga observed that the pleader was practically prompting the witness.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Khatkhate, you can put your question in another shape.

Mr. Khatkhate :—You have no reason to dislike yar *jua ?*

A.—I have every reason to do so. He behaves like a beast towards us.

The Magistrate :—Why do you say ' us ' ?

A.—I mean towards myself and towards the complainants.

The Magistrate :—Are you not a match for him ? (Loud laugh.)

A.—But I have not the power and the means to oppress, which that individual holds.

The Magistrate :—Perhaps you are undervaluing your resources. You may be oppressing some one less important. (Roars of laughter.)

Q.—The learned counsel there (pointing to Mr. Aga) is said to be betrathed to the second complainant. Do you know this to be true ?

A.—I know that to be true. But I don't know that he is learned. That is still to be proved.

The Magistrate :—Witness, you are insulting the advocate. Your pleader did not ask an imperfectly educated man to sit in judgment on his learned friend.

Then without waiting for the witness's reply he asked Mr. Khatkhate what he was driving at by asking such questions to the witness.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Hanar, I waant to prove bias and aanimus.

The Magistrate :—But you must cut it short.

Q.—Do you think thiat thiat little lady Roshanbai has aapeared as a witness on the other side of her own aacord ?

A.—Certainly not. She would never have done it, had she

not been instigated and put up by her wily father.

The Magistrate :—Witness, you must desist from applying such wily adjectives to the witnesses on the other side or I shall be compelled to punish you.

Q.—Vat is yar aabject in helping the complainants in this caz ? Do you do it of yar own free will or only becaz they have asked you to do it ?

A.—I do it of my own free will, because they have all along been very kind to me, helped me in my difficulties and because the man who should have stood by their side has mercilessly deserted them.

Mr. Khatkhate here declared that he wanted the witness no more, and the witness thereupon tramped out pompously with an air of doubtful triumph. The next to be called in was the complainants' servant Rama.

This man belonged to a sect known as *Lallyas*, who are a lower class of servants, mostly household drudges. They speak corrupt Gujarati and are thoroughly illiterate. His evidence had of course to be interpreted.

Q.—Yar name?

A.—*Are sab* (O, Sir), what have you got to do with a poor man's name ?

Q.—But you must give yar name ?

A.—My name is Rama ; if you like, Chhipa ; if you like, Bhulia.

Q.—How do yar *Baisahebs* cal you ?

A.—*Baisabs* call me Rama.

Q.—Vat is yar father's name ?

A.—O, Sir, please don't do *zoolam* [1] on me. I will give his name but never my wife's. (Loud laugh.) My mother's husband's name was Rakhma.

Q.—Yar age ?

[1] Oppression.

A.—Age ? How am I to know it ? I was born five years after my eldest brother's death and two years before my sister's birth. (Roars of laughter.)

The Magistrate remarked that Rama's age was not of any consequence and that Mr. Khatkhate ought to know better at his age.

Q.—How laang have you been in the service of the complainants ?

A.—May be three years, may be two years, may be ten months.

Q.—Do you remember the third day of the current month which was Roshanbai's birthday ?

A.—How should I not ?

Q.—Do you remember vat haapened thiat day ?

A.—Yes. I swept the floor ; I cleaned the furniture, washed the utensils, ate, drank and slept. (Loud laugh.)

Q.—Vat else did you do ?

A.—How could I tell ? You ask me and I will answer.

Q.—Did yar *Baisahebs* send you down to invite somebody to partake of the dinner ?

A.—Yes, such a thing did occur. The *Baisahs* sent me down to Thritibai and Jal.

Q.—Vat far ?

A.—To ask them to go up and dine with them.

Q.—Did they go ?

A.—No. They said they could not do so.

Q.—Did anyone else go to invite them ?

A.—How can I say ? In our country such invitations are proffered only once. (Roars of laughter.)

Q.—Viary well. Did you see Thritibai and Jal dine with yar mistresses ?

A.—Don't you know Thritibai is blind ? How could she go ? But Jalbaba did dine with my ladies.

Q.—Vat haapened after the dinner vas over ?

A.—What a question ? You seem never to have been at a dinner. I gave them ice, soda, *limblet* (lemonade), rice-pudding and fruit.

Q.—Vat haapened then ?

A.—Then all was over. I helped to clear the table and being very hungry helped myself with the remains. No want of *khana* in this house, Sir, plenty to eat ; plenty to eat.

The Magistrate :—And not plenty to drink ? (Loud laugh.)

Rama :—What does the *Bara Sab* say ?

The Interpreter :—The *Saheb* wants to know if you don't get plenty of drink there.

A.—The *Baisab* does give us *bevda* [1] on birthdays and new year days. I had plenty of *limblet* on that day and plenty of *bevda* too.

The Magistrate :—After the midday feast attended by Jalbaba was over ?

The *Lallya* was so pleased that *Lallya-like* he answered pompously, " *O, yetch.* I took some from the *Mhota Bai*, [2] told *Chera Bai* [3] I had none from her, who thereupon gave me two glassfuls. The cook and the ayah gave me some from their own."

The Magistrate :—And you kept quite sober ?

A.—How could I, Sir ? Was it not a day to eat, drink and make merry ? I got a little drunk and being a singer kept singing.

The Magistrate :—Did not your *Baisaheb* blame you ?

A.—Of course she did but I was too far gone to care for it.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Khatkhate, I have noted the drink business. You may now proceed with the examination.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Vat haapened then ?

A.—The *Mhota Bai* called me to the dining-room and asked me to wait there till she and *Chera Bai* returned from the cook-room where they were wanted by the cook.

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[1] Country-made strong drink. [2] The elder mistress of the house.

[3] The younger mistress of the house.

Q.—Vat haapened niaxt ?

A.—Yah, how long am I to go on answering you ? There's all the sweeping and cleaning waiting for me there.

Q.—You need nat be aufraid. The *Baisaheb* will nat blame you, and I will nat be viary lang now. Vat haapened niaxt ?

Rama seemed to be quite at sea at this question. He scratched his head and seemed as if in doubt what to say. At last gathering his wits he answered :

" O yes, yes, I remember. Jalbaba got up from his chair and went into the room."

Q.—Vat room ?

A.—Next room. You don't understand room ?

Q.—How many rooms open on to the dining-room ?

A.—Two on one side and one on the other.

The Magistrate :—What are these three rooms ?

A.—One is a dressing-room, one a big bathroom and one the *Baisab's* own room.

The Magistrate :—Then which room did he go in ?

The *Lallya* seemed confused again but soon answered—

" He went into the bathroom."

The Magistrate noted this down.

Mr. Khatkhate to the witness :—Is there not a dar-way between the bathroom and the *Baisaheb's* private room where she keeps her cupboard of arnaments and her safe ?

Mr. Aga :—Mr. Khatkhate is prompting the witness.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Interpreter, please ask the witness if there is a door-way to the bathroom.

The witness :—Yes, there is another doorway between the bathroom and the *Baisaheb's* own room.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Vas it laacked or open when Jalbaba went into the bathroom ?

A.—Yes — No — Oh yes, it was open — No — it must be locked.

Q.—Do you know vat yar *Baisaheb* keeps in the private room?

A.—There is a writing table, there is a sofa, there is a safe, a cupboard, also her *sari* and her blouse and slipper and some chairs.

Q.—Did you not tell Jalbaba he should not go into the private room?

A.—How could I? He went into the bathroom. Yes—Yes—I told him he should not go into the private room.

Q.—Can you tell us why he went into the bathroom?

A.—Why? Likely because he wanted to clean out his mouth. Likely because he wanted a draught of cold water from the *mutka*.[1] Our *mutka* is a Surti *mutka*; it keeps the water so cool. (Vivacious hilarity.)

Q.—Vat dar did he come out of? The dar of the bathroom or the dar of the private room?

Another scratch of the head and then an answer:

"Door of the private room."

The Magistrate to the Interpreter:—Tell the man to think well before he replies.

The Interpreter:—You remember, witness, you are on oath here. We want to know if Jalbaba came out of the bathroom door or from the private room door.

A.—Why do you bother a poor man so? Has not he enough troubles of his own? His little girl died two months ago. His wife and her mother-in-law worry him and the former fixes her nails in his flesh and tears it out.

The Interpreter:—The court is sorry for your troubles. But you must answer the question clearly.

A.—Well then, I don't know. May be he came out of the bathroom door, may be he came out of the private room door.

The Magistrate noted this.

Mr. Khatkhate:—Where were you standing when Jalbaba came out of the bathroom? Were you facing the bathroom and the

[1] An earthen pot to hold water, made in Surat.

the private room or the *Baisaheb's* dressing-room on the other side ?

A.—I don't quite remember. But I think I was facing the private room.

Q.—Did you suspect anything when Jalbaba came out of the bathroom ?

A.—How could I ? He is not a *chor* (thief). Yes —yes— I am told he is a *chor*.

The Magistrate :—Told by whom ?

A.—By all in the house.

The Magistrate ?—All in the house ? Did Ardeshir Sheth and Roshanbai tell you so,

A.—How could they ? They are all fighting daily. Ardeshir Sheth and Roshanbai never speak to me except when they want me to do something for them. They don't like me.

The Magistrate :—You say they are all fighting. What do you mean by all. The cook and the ayah and the boy ?

A.—O, you are so green. I mean the *Chheth Sab*, the *Baisab* and *Cherabai*.

The Magistrate :—Did they fight on Roshanbai's birthday also ?

A.—*O yechh*, they fought and fought very loudly too. They never did like that before.

The Magistrate :—What did they fight about ?

A.—O ! the *Baisabs* wanted to send Roshanbai to school ; the *Sethsab* would not have it. Then there was the *chori*. [1]

The Magistrate :—What *chori* ?

A.—The *chori* committed by Jalbaba.

The Magistrate to Mr. Khatkhate :—I am sorry, Mr. Khatkhate, to disturb you so often. But Rama though a servant is an important witness and besides he is such a troublesome witness for you that I should like to relieve you of the bother of his examination as much

[1] Theft.

as possible. (The spectators chuckled.)

Mr. Khatkhate felt very uneasy and thought as if he were sinking in the floor. He almost wished the floor would open and swallow him. His reverie was disturbed by the Magistrate who said he could now proceed with the examination.

Q.—Did you suspect anything when Jalbaba came out of the private room ?

A.—I said it was well he came out of the room so soon for if the *Baisabs* had seen him coming out of the room they would have devoured him and me alive.

The Magistrate :—Are they cannibals ? (Vociferous laughter, some clapping of hands and some cries of " To be sure they are, to be sure they are.")

Q.—How laang vas he before he came out of the room ?

A.—As long as it takes to open the *mutka*, drink water from it and close it.

The Magistrate :—Did you hear Jal removing the plate from the *mutka* and replacing it ? Is it a glass-plate or a copper plate ?

A.—O, a thick glass plate, rather cracked and with a red border. The *Sab* knows such a plate when put over a *mutka* makes a noise.

The Magistrate :—And you heard the noise in the dining-room ?

A.—To be sure I did. I am not deaf. I am a little lame. I had a fall when I was a boy and my right leg slightly drags. But I am such a fellow, I drag it. I am the master ; not he. (Those in the room, Mr. Khatkhate including, were literally convulsed.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—Vat haapened then ? Did you think Jalbaba had removed anything on the sly from the private room ?

A.—How am I to know it ? I do not know if the *kabat* were open or not. He had nothing in his hands but he may have had something in his pocket. I have not four eyes that I could look into his pocket.

The Magistrate :—Then you personally know nothing about the theft ?

A.—O, why not ? Did not the *Mhota Bai* and *Chota Bai* [1] tell me all about it after Jalbaba left ? They blamed me for being so careless, blamed me that I should have allowed him to go into the private room, said I would have to give evidence in the court and that they would dismiss me if I did not tell the truth here.

Mr. Khatkhate :—When did the *Baisahebs* return from the cook room ?

A.—As soon as Jalbaba returned to the dining-room.

Q.—Vat haapened niaxt ?

A.—Jalbaba said he was going. They pressed him to stay till tea-time but he would not. I was feeling very sleepy and being very anxious to lie down was preparing to leave the room when Jalbaba left.

Q.—Vas Jalbaba sitting or standing when the ladies returned to the dining-room ?

A.—O, to be sure, he was sitting.

Mr. Khatkhate said the examination was over and the witness was asked to leave the box. He was very nervous and shaky and looked as if he would fall. The *chaprasi* led him out of the room.

The examination-in-chief being now over, the proceedings were adjourned to the following day.

[1] The younger mistress of the house.

CHAPTER XXIX

MEHELOOJI IN BROWN STUDY

"No profit grows, where is no pleasure ta'en;
In brief, sir, study what you most affect."

SHAKESPEARE'S *The Taming of the Shrew.*

HAVE I told you that our friend Mr. Mehelooji was a wee bit of a philosopher and a little of a poet? I don't think I have. Well then, take him to be so and you will understand him better. You see him seated in his fine little library to-day, lost in meditation. A glass of fine milk-white toddy stood by him on a stand. It was so fresh that it was bubbling over. But he did not care for it.

To-day he was not his usual self; quiet, contented and considerate. To-day he was determined to look into the inmost recesses of his heart, determined to rummage his brains and to cudgel them for something he wanted to but could not solve; something which puzzled and annoyed him. Determined he was to turn his heart and head inside out. He was sitting to-day in judgment on himself. He was holding a mental court of enquiry of his own, wherein he himself was judge, jury and accused.

So far out with himself was he that he did not even notice the presence of his wife, who had walked in quietly to talk to him but seeing him lost in reverie had quietly seated herself in a corner of the room. From there she looked at her mate with her beautiful, large, dark orbs intently fixed on him. They seemed to say, I am anxious, husband mine, to share your woes and worries if you would only allow it. It was this lady's wont not to disturb her husband or interfere with his meditations or reading but to wait patiently until he was free to listen to her. Her husband was her

friend, philosopher and guide. In one respect she was in nowise changed. She loves him, loved him, loved him first and last, and will love him on for ever ;—now she knows, she will love him always. She had no reason for this than a woman's reason. She adored him, she said, because she did adore him. Upon her face there was the tint of grief, the settled shadow of an inward strife. She would have risen and going to her husband would have thrown her arms round his neck but just then that worthy began to give a more tangible form and expression to his thoughts.

"Am not I rich ?" he muttered as if addressing himself. "Am not I strong and healthy ? Am not I influential ? Do I not hold sway over this large tract of land and lord it over so many, ready to be at my beck and call ? Have not I a little bit of a head over my shoulders ? Have not I form and features and a cut and figure that so many envy and so many feel jealous of ? Am not I good and charitable ? Have I ever done good to beget good ? Am not I loved, loved and liked by all and sundry, loved by my own people and above all loved by a strictly pure and tender soul ?—Oh ! Love is too soft a word for that love which is the outcome of a holy Zoroastrian union—the love of a wife, a wife who has in me her all in all, who has never looked to anyone for love and loved no one but me. And yet what is the use of all this ?

"Don't you see," he muttered a bit louder as if now addressing some one else ; some invisible spirits in the air or in the skies ; "and yet I ask, what is the use and what the object of all this ? Is money the be-all and end-all of existence ? Oh, childless ! Childless ! Sonless ! Daughterless ! How very relentless ! A father without a son !—A millionaire without a successor ! Childless ! Childless ! I wonder, how I have not gone mad, not become heartless and indifferent, not become cruel and callous, not become godless !

"Is not a father without a son like a house without an exit ; like a city without citizens, like a medicine without virtue ?

Times were when a luckless man like me took to himself more than one wife. With the Parsi law coming in, polygamy has gone out for good and monogamy has come in, come in to stay perhaps to the happiness of wives, perhaps to the happiness of husbands but surely not for the happiness of such miserables as me. Oh, what am I saying? Am not I blaspheming? Am not I disloyal? Am not I inconsistent? Am not I sinning without being sinned against? Does that angel of a Chandan deserve all this? Is she not an angel? Could I afford to lose her for a daughter or even for a son? No; something within me says, no! I remember some one saying :

'It's true, perfection none can hope to find
In all this world, much less in womankind.'

"Whoever said so, it is wrong, downright wrong; he should have said 'much less in humankind.' The woman is no better than the man and the man is no better than the woman, some say. The man's experience is that woman is better than man. The woman's experience is that man is better than woman. Conclusion :– there are women worse than the worst of men and there are men worse than the worst of women. They say you can improve a depraved man but never a depraved woman and that woman once fallen in the path of vice is fallen for ever."

The woman in that corner there who erstwhile was for moving stuck more closely to her seat. She was speechless but eager to hear, to hear what came next. And she had not long to wait for the speaker began anon.

"That angel Chandan has something on her mind. She knows she wants a child and she knows I must be wanting one, more than she. Were we living in the olden times, which some call good and some call bad, she would have herself asked me to take unto me another wife. She would ask me now to take unto me a son. If it were left to me I would take him for a son whom she has in mind. Does she read my mind as I do hers? Perhaps

she does ; perhaps she does not. I am afraid to speak out my mind and she is afraid to speak out hers for her fear is the same as mine. That boy—that brother of hers—is going bad ways, they say. We know he is not and yet we are so afraid ! Rustom—Rusi would be a jewel of a boy were he steady."

There was another and a longer pause, during which his thoughts appeared to have gone off at a tangent.

" Is Rustom the only lad of his kind in the community ? Are not there so many, oh, so very many, with the outward halo of religion and reform, who are yet worse than he ? What dark soul and foul thoughts do they not hide beneath ! But why about boys alone ? What about the girls ? What about the community itself ? Are we progressing on the onward path of name and fame ; of religion and reform ; of demarcation and distinction or are we going down the downward path of impotence and inability ; demoralisation and depravity ; disunion and degradation ; disintegration and extinction ? There are some who not knowing what religion is call themselves religious. It is the so-called orthodox sect. They try to do good but work evil. There are others who call themselves progressive. They know what religion is ; they know what reform is and though calling themselves reformers they will not help to raise and reform those who depend on them for true religion and righteous reformation. What is true of the orthodox and of the reformer is true of their organs."

The soliloquiser here glanced meaningly at some of the Parsi dailies and weeklies which were strewn about him—looked at them with an air of pity and concern—an air of commisseration. He then broke out again.

" We Parsis were the pioneers of the press and the paper. What is the business of the press ? It is to press forward truth and suppress untruth. They did it years ago ; they do the reverse now. They lived for truth before ; they live for untruth now."

Lifting one after another of the newspapers about him he went on : " May be this is wrong ; may be this is right. May be that is wrong ; may be that is right. Oh, how I wish, how I long for them to be all right. One says, ' Right is might ; I am rightful and therefore I am mighty.' Another says like the German Zohak, ' might is right,' ' I am mighty and therefore I am right.' It is a sad pass the community has come to betwixt them all. They know it ; they see it ; they feel it and yet they will not improve it. They have eyes but they will not see. They have ears but they will not hear. We say we are charitable and yet we are not. I have given a thousand here and five thousand there, ten thousand here and twenty thousand there but nothing for a solid purpose, a solid good, an everlasting blessing to the community."

Just when he was coming to himself his fingers travelled to a newspaper and he lifted it up. His eyes caught a heading which set him soliloquising again, ' Firdausi's [1] Memorial ! ' He did not stop to read further for he knew what it was.

" Oh ! How disloyal we are ! " he murmured.—" Disloyal to that great man who has sung at the opening of his great epic, the Shah-Nameh [2] :—

' For thirty long years have I toiled and moiled and
suffered privations.
To revive Persia amongst the Parsis.'

" We are stamped fire-worshippers. Was it not that self-same immortal man that extricated us from this charge ? For hath he not said further on in his great book :—

' Say not they were worshippers of Fire,
Say they were worshippers of the One Great God.'

" But why talk of Firdausi alone ? What about the two great Parsis of the age—the heroes who lived with the people and for the people—the heroes who laid down their lives in the

[1] The great epic poet of Persia.

[2] The record of Persian kings and heroes, Firdausi's great epic.

service of the people ? Dadabhai [1] and Mehta,[2] men of immortal fame, what must their souls be thinking of their countrymen now ? What have their co-religionists done for them ? Oh ! Disgrace ! Disgrace ! Disgrace for the Parsis ! Disgrace for the Hindus ! Disgrace for the Mahomedans ! Disgrace for all those who run after less important individualities and vote funds and statues to perpetuate their memory !"

The soliloquiser stopped only to gather breath and then launched into a bit of poetry. 'Thou shalt, Mehelooji,' he murmured, 'thou shalt at any rate vote an ode to their memory' :—

"Hail ! Patriots triumphant, born in happier days,
Immortal heirs of universal praise,
Whose honours with increase of ages grow
As streams roll down enlarging as they flow !
Countrymen unborn your mighty names shall sound
And world's applause that may not yet be found."

He then suddenly stopped and sank back into the chair. Then sitting up as suddenly he burst out :—

"O Yezdah [3] ! Yezdah ! what are we coming to ? What has Aheriman brought us to ? Where are we drifting to ? Where are our fifty lakhs a year going to ? We sow and we do not reap. We do not prevent waste so that we may not want. Where we can spend a pie we waste a pound. The means that we adopt to make our community are the very ones that mar it. Our charities are without organization. Our schemes of education and advancement are but a myth. Our social reform is a misnomer ; our progress a platitude. We go a thinking and beget nothing. We let things slide and we are sliding slowly and surely. We aim at

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[1] The great Parsi social and political reformer, the first Indian member of Parliament.

[2] The Hon'ble Sir P. M. Mehta, whose untiring devotion to the people of Bombay and India in general and whose political career of nigh upon half a century are matters of Indian history.

[3] The Almighty God.

existence but work at extinction. We have the wish and the will but will not act. We have means and money but will only ill spend them. Though grown-up we play at toys and dolls. Year in and year out we are tired of them like children and throw them away or break them only to get new ones. We have a new *bahoo*[1] every year. We are forced to obey not by fair words and good counsel but by fright and fabrications. The reformers say they are rich and wise. They can guide and lead but they will not be leaders. They can organize but they will not be organisers. They have an eye to the main chance and will not give a chance to their people. The orthodox lamentably lack sense and judgment. They work for good and produce but evil. They know how to organize but end in disorganisation and disorder. Who is then to blame? The orthodox or the reformer or the medley of interlopers—the self-styled *Soshiants*[2] of the community—who though outwardly Zorastrians are still not so? They say they work for the spread of Zorastrianism and peace but they confess to have worked only paganism and pauperism. For the spread and enlargement of a new-fangled creed of their own, the *Soshiants* and the interlopers do not allow the orthodox and the reformer to meet on a common platform and to unite and work for the common weal of the community. They surely are at the bottom of the mischief. But I cannot exonerate the reformer. He is more to blame than the orthodox. For by the mere lifting of his last finger he could put his foot down on the mischief-makers and crush them.

"Ah me! Ah me! for the frailty of human wishes! Oh that Zoraster were alive to enliven us! Oh for a real out-and-out *Soshiant* to be born amongst us and for him to outstrip and bury the false ones of the day! Let us hope the eyes of the hoodwinked

[1] A phantom.

[2] According to the ancient Persian tradition, they are men destined to be born in after ages to reform and rejuvenate the world and its religion,

and the hoodwinker, the fallen and the benighted will open ; that the light of truth will drive away the gloom of untruth ; that apathy will give way to energy and that a day will dawn when we will rise again and find ourselves really great and good, working for the good of the community and for the restoration of its time-honoured purity and progress, working for the abolition of prejudices and superstitious practices and the removal of execrescences that have gathered round our great religion which is at once religion, science, poetry, sanitation, hygiene, philosophy and above all sound common sense, purity and virtue.

" We have associations and club-doms in shoals. They abound like mushrooms. Goodness knows where they come from, whither they are bound and how and for what they manage to exist. Lucky it is that the majority of them are harmless though they are no use to themselves or to those they pretend to benefit. The few, however, that pose as pioneers of social, moral and religious reforms are the most mischievous "—the speaker tarried here a minute, slightly bent his head, dropped his eyelids, pressed his fingers against them and gave them a goodly rub as if to shake off his lethargy. He then exclaimed as suddenly—" Avount on them ! Nobody cares to enquire into their fitness and qualifications. They are a mixture of Zorastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Theosophism and what not ? They poke their noses and are in eternal evidence here, there and everywhere—*Atashbehrâms* and *Agiâries* not excepted —and put in the thin end of their Theosophical wedge under the name of religious, moral and social reform. They take good care to see that nobody enquires into their uprise, origin, number, resources, rules and regulations and their principles and organisation, if any. Occasionally a misguided *Dastoor* presides at their *tamashas* and makes a show of siding with them but he goes into sulks soon enough and slides away. It is not an unusual sight to see these self-constituted *Soshiants*, these cheap popularity-

seekers, these players to the gallery, get in at the front door of an *Atashbehrâm* or *Agiâry* for preaching an homily to their victims in embryo and getting out at the back door only to mount the steps of the fire horse and swiftly slide over the iron path in company with a number of half-witted crazy Parsi women to visit the Hindoo *Mandirs* and prostrate themselves at the feet of *Gosais* and *Bavas*, to squat on *patlas*, go into *samathi* in *langots* and leave on *dal* and *bhaji* at Kashi, Benares and at Adyiar which is the principal seat of their patron saint Anne Bessant, the famous successor-in-chief and the only accredited agent on this earth of Colonel Olcott and Madam Blavatsky of Theosophical fame."

The speaker here rose and roared :—"Beware ! Parsis beware" —he thundered—"Ye fathers and mothers, ye guardians and wards, ye aunts and uncles, beware ! Under the name of *humbandgi*, *bhakti* and *kirtan* your children are being slyly but surely broken into the harness of Theosophism, Buddhism, Hinduism and what is more, rank superstition and superstitious practices. Under the guise of *akagrah bundghi*, which means concentration of mind whilst praying, they point to and preach but idol worship. They take care to instil and impress on the juvenile mind words drawn from Hindu religious books as if their synonyms did not exist in our books of religion. They use the word *Parmatma* for *Hormuzd*, *Bhakti* and *Kirtan* for *Bundgis* and *Shan Bhuvan* for *Atashbehrâms* and *Agiâries*.

"O God ! O God ! Bless us and save us from these so-called friends of ours. It is these men that hold *jayantis* or anniversary days of great Parsis and exhort young Parsis to walk in their footsteps but they vote not a pie to commemorate their memory or to help their memorial buildings or institutions. They have erected a memorial column at Sanjan to mark the defeat and flight and not the victory of Parsi emigrants from the land of Iran to the land of idol worshippers. Likely enough they will put up a similar column at the same place or at Div Bunder to

mark the blessed day on which the Parsis to a man will live the pure and simple creed of Zoraster and embrace idol worship." The speaker drooped and went off into a doze. His foot came into contact with something lying on the ground and he started. "Hallo! What's this," he cried? "Oh, it's the 'milk and water' daily, the 'hot and cold blow' weekly and the '*Moombai noo Maloo*' bi-weekly. They pretend to be Parsi Zorastrians and yet their mouths are gagged. They are in the confidence of the idol worshippers and know fully what they are up to, but they dare not quarrel or pick holes in them for they are so full of holes themselves. I have picked them up from the ground but they deserve to be floored. Here's the 'Soap and Bubble' daily of 16th May. In it one of our *Dastoors* decries and declaims in words of gold the efforts of Parsi speakers on the communal platform slowly but slyly leading the minds of their hearers away from the selected Zorastrian theme for the day to the tenets of Hinduism, Buddhism and idol worship. Confound them all," he roared, thrusting the papers aside with disgust. "It's this very *Dastoor* that will run after and cajole these hoodwinkers and preside at their meetings perforce.

"There! There! Oh! the forgetful me! What about our charitable institutions and asylums; our *dharam* funds; our sanatoriums; our dispensaries and our hospitals? How are they managed? Do they flourish or do they flounder? Do the do'nors know if they are alert or asleep? Once they launched their barks on the wide bosom of the sea they care not if they sink or swim. And what do they really do? Are they a credit to the community? Are they a credit to those who established them? Are they a credit to themselves or to those who manage them? Tush! Tush! Pshaw! It's nothing of the kind. They are unsound, unstable and tottering. They are a mixture of mismanagement and misrule. They manage somehow to live but they certainly do not thrive. They eke out a miserable existence

making those who take advantage of them equally miserable. They do not run but creep. The managers and the trustees only help them to do so. They never aim like Peabody or Andrew Carnegy at purity and perfection for they are anything but perfect themselves and know only how to let things slide on the principle of 'Beggars cannot be Choosers.' Where is the master-hand that will run to their rescue? Where is the Good Samaritan that will purify and perfect them? Echo answers nowhere! and slowly but solemnly tolls their death-knell !!!"

He felt exhausted and sank back in his chair breathless. A minute or two after, he came to himself and sat up as suddenly. He turned on one side and his eyes caught those of Chandan, which were pointed at him as if in mute appeal.

"Oh Chandan, Chandan," he cried out, "that boy is going headlong. He is going to rack and ruin; he'll get his death of it. You must check the boy. You must ask him to draw the reins in."

Meek Chandan who always looked up and appealed to her husband in all matters of doubt and difficulty through her large and expressive eyes, looked now for enlightenment in the same way. This time the speech of the tongue assisted the inquiry of the eyes.

"What boy, Mehelooji dear? What boy are you speaking of? There is no boy in the house now, husband dear."

"Oh, for a simpleton!" responded the husband dear. "What boy, you say? Why, who else could it be but Rusi, your brother! —who might long ago have stood in the stead of a son to us and loyally discharged all the duties and responsibilities of a true son of Zoraster! I tell you, Chandan, I feel for the boy. I feel for him as I should have felt for one of my own flesh and blood. You have not spoken but you have longed to say: 'Mehelooji, we want a son, adopt Rustom.' I have desired to say the same but somehow my tongue has cloven to the roof. Thank God I have had it out

now. We shall bring back the stray sheep to its fold, make him give up his doubtful ways and behave like a son unto us. You have been a listener, Chandan, I do believe, to all the nonsense that I have talked, the arrant nonsense about.—"

"Don't repeat it, Mehelooji dear, don't repeat it. I have heard it and I don't blame you for it. See, here is proof, solid proof, of the truth of my words."

Is it for us to look any more on what followed? Chandan threw herself into her husband's arms and locked in each other's embrace and with her head on his sheltering breast she sobbed audibly. They were tears of mingled joy and sorrow, sorrow and joy. How long they remained in this condition we cannot say but like all things else you must take it that they soon were themselves again and moving and doing as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER XXX

INNOCENCE INCRIMINATED

"*Justice, while she winks at crimes,*
Stumbles on innocence sometimes."

BUTLER.

ON the opening of the court on the appointed day Mr. Aga said that with his Worship's permission he would put in the written statements of the accused. The statements were then put in and admitted by the Magistrate.

Statement of the First Accused.

"I, Jal Feroze Patel, aged about sixteen, Parsi by birth and Zorastrian by religion, call God and my Prophet to bear witness and say that I am entirely innocent of the charge that has been laid against me by my aunt and cousin, Bai Meherbanoo and Bai Sherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal. From infancy upwards I have been brought up in the path of religion and rectitude and have done nothing of which I should be ashamed ; nor the slightest thing to disgrace my parents and family. If face be the index of the soul the court can read my innocence in my face. I have borne a splendid character and name at school and college as will be evident from the six several certificates from my teachers and professors, which are annexed to this statement. I and my sister are the victims of a plot studiously planned and carried out by the complainants Meherbanoo and Sherbanoo with the assistance of Mr. Erach Aga. The said plot is, I firmly believe, the outcome of long rankling and bitter feelings engendered, by what I know not, on the part of the abovenamed three individuals. Neither my sister nor I nor our late lamented father and mother have ever

given any cause to the complainants to entertain any evil feeling against us ; much less to harass and persecute us ; still less to lay out a deliberate plot to entrap us and to expose us to shame and ridicule.

" On the 3rd day of the current month, when it is said I committed the theft in Meherbanoo and Sherbanoo's lodgings, I had not the slightest idea, nor had my sister, that we would be invited to dine with them. The invitation came on us like a surprise, not to say a thunderbolt, it being in fact the first invitation of the kind we had ever received from them. I would not have accepted it, had not the second complainant not satisfied with our giving a reply in the negative to her servant Rama, come down personally and pressed my sister and myself to go and dine with them. My sister and our trusted ayah also persuaded me to go. Little did I know that I was being most mercilessly and intentionally inveigled into a trap. That a trap was laid and that I fell into it will be proved by the evidence which my man of law will lead. With not the slightest idea of the complainants' leaving the dining room and with the certainty of their returning to it any moment it would pass the court's belief to know how the idea of a theft or any misdeed or misdemeanour could have arisen in my mind. Besides, I had no idea where the complainants kept their valuables. I was not aware they had left or would leave their cupboard open. There was absolutely no inducement for me to leave the dining-room and to go into any other apartment. The articles would be of no use to me without knowing how to convert them into money. I am not hardened ; I am not a rogue ; I am not a thief and have never stolen a pie. Granting I were so, would I be so mean as to bring a blind sister of mine to serious grief and trouble by making her a party to my offence ? And if I wanted to do so, would my sister aid and abet me in the offence ? Those who know my sister Thriti will say, no, certainly not. Could I be so bold and callous as to blight all my prospects present and future for the sake of a

few hundred rupees? Are there not friends and relatives to see that we are not compelled either to beg or borrow? Dare our accusers say that we have contracted debts or that we stood in need of immediate relief? Have we not paid our rent regularly? Are we not economising? Are we not selling off our belongings and are about to go into cheaper quarters? I solemnly aver that I am completely innocent of the charge laid against me and so help me God."

Statement of the Second Accused.

"I, Thriti Feroze Patel, make oath and depose as follows:— I am a Parsi by birth and Zorastrian by religion. I am twenty years of age. Since my mother's death which occurred about six months ago I have been living with my brother Jal and two female servants on the ground floor of Meher Villa at Grant Road belonging to the first complainant my *masi* or maternal aunt Meherbanoo. My parents also lived there during their lifetime. Some months past I have been blind. I make my living with the help of some dear friends and relatives, by giving tuitions in music and English. For a long time past our family has been on very bad terms, which has not been of our own seeking or desire, with my aunt Bai Meherbanoo and her daughter Sherbanoo. This ill-feeling has of late reached a climax. Certain events preceding the occurrence of the alleged theft made me and my friends suspect that some serious plot was being hatched against us by the first and second complainants with the help of my cousin Mr. Erach Aga. Matters looked so serious that we had to consult our friends, who warned us to be on our guard.

"On the day on which the theft is said to have taken place, that is the 3rd day of the current month, my brother and I were at home. Cousin Roshan, who though it was her birthday had been ordered to school by her mother, returned therefrom shortly after she had been there as she felt very unwell. Being afraid of her mother's anger she took shelter in our quarters and remained

there till after school hours, when she was supposed to return home. In honour of Roshan's birthday, at about 11 A.M. the complainants had sent their servant Rama to invite us to dine with them. As we expressed our inability to accept the invitation the second complainant came in person to invite us. Jal accepted the invitation but I could not as I am in mourning for my mother. At about one o'clock Jal returned apparently in a huff and was soon busy looking over picture albums and talking with Roshan in the inner room. I was arranging certain things in my cupboard with the aid of my trusted ayah Candida. Candida having occasion to go to the kitchen did so for a few minutes, leaving me sitting by the cupboard with the doors thereof open. I was so taken up with my own thoughts that I did not hear any one coming in or going out during the few minutes that my ayah was away and sat quietly by in a chair. On her return, I remember the ayah taking me to task for having left the front door ajar and inquiring if I were sure nobody had come in. I replied that so far as I could say no one had. I have never done anything in my life to make me ashamed of myself. We have been brought up, my brother and I, in the strict path of rectitude and honour ; and we would disdain to tell a lie or to do anything that is not right, much more to commit a theft. My consternation at knowing that a jewel-case was actually found in my cupboard can be easily imagined. A case however was actually found in the *chorkhana* of my cupboard. I solemnly aver that it was not put in there by my brother Jal, and certainly not with my knowledge or consent. I firmly believe that it was put in there by an agent of Meherbanoo during the time that my ayah was away. My Advocate will prove that such was the case. In the meanwhile, I say on oath that I have not been a party to the alleged theft, nor aided and abetted in the alleged offence and so help me God."

The effect produced on the listeners when the reading of the statements was in progress is worthy of note. At every sentence their countenances were transformed. They denoted excitement,

anger, whole-hearted sympathy and righteous indignation and not the least tender commisseration. The changes in their countenances synchronised with their postures. They were restless. Some of them lifted themselves from their seats and seemed as if they would rush at the complainants and tear them to pieces. The complainants were not unaware of this. But the climax was yet to come. When the reading of the statements was over, the Magistrate said that he was sorry to say that so far as the case had proceeded a *prima facie* case had been made out by the complainants and that he had no alternative but to draw up charges against the accused. He would, said the Magistrate, go a little out of his way and say that in one respect it was better than discharging the case for it would give the accused an opportunity of completely proving their innocence if they were really innocent and of leaving the court spotless and honourably.

The charges were then read out :—

"I, Minocheher Khurshed Modi, Second Presidency Magistrate of Bombay, hereby charge you Jal Feroze Patel and Thriti Feroze Patel as follows :—

"That you, Jal, on the 3rd day of the current month at about eleven of the clock in the morning went into the lodgings of Bai Meherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal and committed the theft of a small case containing various ornaments of the aggregate value of Rs. 1,500 by taking it out of the possession of the complainants Meherbanoo and Sherbanoo ; an offence punishable under Section 379 of the Indian Penal Code and within my cognisance.

"That you, Thriti, aided and abetted your brother in the offence by receiving and retaining the said stolen property in your possession.

"I, therefore, commit you both, and order that you be tried on the said charges."

After the charges were read out the Magistrate asked the

accused if they pleaded guilty or not guilty. The accused, who had maintained their composure so far, were thoroughly disconcerted at that direct question and broke down. Jal sobbed out that he was innocent. Thriti gave vent to an outburst of tears. With hands uplifted to Heaven she told the Magistrate that as she had a soul to save she and her brother were innocent. This was said so pathetically that all present and even the Magistrate were deeply moved. His Worship very kindly assured the brother and sister that he was there to award justice in the sight of Him who always saw that the innocent did not suffer.

When this climax was reached the excitement of the spectators knew no bounds. They hissed the complainants and would have rushed at them had not the police seeing the danger led them out of the room and saw them safe to their carriage.

The court then dispersed.

CHAPTER XXXI

SOME STERN REALITIES OF THE LAW COURTS

"*He that goes to law (as the proverb is) holds a wolf by the ears.*"

BURTON'S *Anatomy of Melancholy*
(Democritus to the Reader).

WHEN the court sat again the Magistrate asked Mr. Khatkhate if he had any more witnesses to examine. Mr. Khatkhate said he had none. Just at this minute a man of Mr. Khatkhate's caste who looked like his clerk came in and whispered something to him. Mr. Khatkhate then asked the Magistrate's permission to leave the court for about ten minutes.

The Magistrate :—I object very much, Mr. Khatkhate, to your request. It is not the first time you have made it and, besides, you are not an exception.

Mr. Khatkhate :—But Yar Worrorship—

The Magistrate :—Pray do not worship me so often and so much, Mr. Khatkhate. Your gods and deities will not like it. You should worship them. The practice of pleaders leaving the court-room in this way is becoming a scandal. You have perhaps a case coming on or being heard in another court and wish to attend to it. Whilst you do that, this court and those busy with it will have to wait and waste their time. Complaints have reached me of pleaders detaining cases of certain clients in one court on various pretexts to attend to those in another court. Only a few days ago a plaintiff complained to me that a pleader in lucrative practice had left him in this way just when his case was coming on though he had paid him a handsome fee. Luckily the plaintiff, who is an educated man, offered to conduct the case

himself. More luckily for him, he won it. If he had applied to me to proceed against the pleader for refund of fees I should certainly have granted the application.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Hanar, I have no case before another Magistrate now. But I vaant to obey the cal of nature.

The Magistrate :—Was your clerk here to call you away for it ?

" No, Sir, he came to tell me my tiffin had come in."

The Magistrate :—So you will obey two calls of nature instead of one and I mercifully allow it. (Laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate was about to leave the court when his Worship detained him saying, Mr. Khatkhate, please tarry a few minutes for I should like you and the other pleaders who have gathered here, to hear what I have to say. Speaking of complaints of clients against pleaders I was told only a few days ago that a pleader who glories in calling himself the lion of the Police courts had undertaken to conduct a case of assault on behalf of the complainant. The said complainant happened to be his friend and naturally relied on him to do his best. What did the gentleman pleader do ? He very ungentlemanly combined with the pleader on the opposite side who happened to be a relative of the complainant and they both got the hearing of the case postponed thrice without the consent of the complainant and letting the presiding Magistrate to understand that the complainant and the accused wanted to come to an understanding. Between the two they persuaded the complainant to accept a very tame apology from the accused and so tired him that the poor complainant who was a busy man consented to accept it. Both the complainant and the accused pleaders knew that the accused was an old offender and that the complainant had a very strong case. The pleaders' behaviour was, to say the least, most unbecoming.

I have heard of another case in which the pleader on behalf of a complainant very coolly informed his client on the day of

hearing of the case that he had lost all the papers that the complainant had entrusted to him. On the complainant expressing his strong displeasure that respectable dignitary had the hardihood to say that the papers were never given to him. In both the above cases my informants have long been known to me as highly respectable and truthful men. I can only hope that law-givers will cease to be law-breakers and thus give the direct lie to the nick-name " Licentiates of Legalised Blunders " which they have got from some quarters. The countenances of all the men of law then present fell seriously at these words. The Magistrate as if he had not noticed it told Mr. Khatkhate that he could now leave for ten minutes only as he desired to do.

Mr. Khatkhate thereupon withdrew.

On his return Mr. Aga said that with his Worship's permission he would go on with the cross-examination of the prosecution witnesses. The Magistrate having accorded the permission, Bai Meherbanoo was called in and cross-examined by Mr. Aga.

Q.—You Meherbanoo are the lawfully wedded wife of Mr. Ardeshir Edulji Dalal, whom you are bound to serve, love, honour and obey. Is it not ?

A.—I am his wife, but—

Q.—There can be no buts here. Say ' yes ' or ' no '.

A.—But—.

Q.—Say 'yes' or ' no '.

A.—I will not unless I am compelled to. You cannot put me down in this way.

The witness here looked as if appealing to the Magistrate.

The Magistrate :—Witness, you must obey the Advocate. The law compels you to do so.

The witness :—Well then yes, I am his lawfully wedded wife.

Q.—And as such are you not bound to serve, love, honour and obey him ?

A.—No. Not unless I am justified to or choose to do it.

The Magistrate :—I have taken a note, witness, that your answer to the last question of the Advocate is ' no '.

Q.—You have never been on peaceful terms with your husband, never served him, loved him, honoured him or obeyed him ?

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, I viary strangly abject to the last question. It is simply taking up the time of the cart.

The Magistrate :—I cannot allow your objection, Mr. Khatkhate. The witness must answer the question.

The witness :—No. I have never had justification to do anything of the kind.

Q.—Have you loved your younger daughter and treated her as well and as nicely as you have loved and treated your elder daughter ?

A.—I cannot say. That depends on circumstances.

Q.—You must say ' yes ' or ' no '.

The witness :—Yes.

Q.—Witness, remember your oath. Your answers to your pleader go to show that you have never liked or loved Roshan and have not treated her the same as you have treated your elder daughter ?

A.—Well then, it's her own fault if I have not either liked or loved her or treated her well.

Q.—What was your object in requesting in the course of your examination-in-chief to have a conversation in private with Miss Roshan ?

A.—I don't remember it now.

Q.—Was it not that you wanted to frighten her and to get her on your side ?

A.—I cannot say.

Q.—But you must say ' yes ' or ' no '.

A.—No.

Q.—Is not Mr. Erach Aga betrothed to the second accused Miss Thriti ?

A.—Yes. What have *you* got to do with it?

Q.—I cannot tell you that. You may ask your pleader about it when you are out of court if you like. He is far too wise and clever to conceal it from you. (Loud laugh.)

Mr. Khatkhate:—Yar Worrorship, the Advocate is insulting me. He must aapologize. The cart's prestige cannot otherwise be maintained.

The Magistrate:—Mr. Khatkhate, I am surprised you should say so. You are taking as a slight what was meant to be a compliment. Was it not so, Mr. Aga?

Mr. Aga:—Certainly it was so, Your Worship. I am sorry if Mr. Khatkhate has misunderstood it.

Q.—You have said in your written statement, witness, that you took it that if the search were successful and you got back your valuables the matter would end there. What made you think that? Did you not consult anyone, for instance, your own husband, about it?

A.—No. I never consult him.

Q.—Why not?

A.—Because I don't like to.

Q.—Did you not consult Mr. Erach Aga?

A.—I don't remember.

Q.—Is he not a constant visitor at your house and always at your beck and call?

A.—No.

Q.—Then, how was it that he accompanied you to the police-station to lodge the information against the accused?

A.—Because he knew all about it and happened to be at our house at the time.

Q.—Then he must have been quite willing and ready to be dragged into the matter?

A.—There was no dragging.

Q.—Then he must have some other object in doing it?

A.—He simply wanted to oblige us. We wanted a gentleman to go with us and we took him.

Q.—Then you think Mr. Erach is a gentleman ? (Laughter.)

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, I cannot allow this question.

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, I will then put it in another shape.

Q.—Do you think the evidence that Mr. Erach has given in this court to be quite true ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Could you not have taken someone else to the police-station instead of Mr. Erach ?—Say, your trustworthy servant Mr. Rama Rakhma, who has so many *aliases* to serve in place of title ? (Outbursts of laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, the Aadvokiat is ridiculing this hanarable lady. (Loud laugh again.)

Q.—Was Mr. Erach invited to dine with you on Roshan's birthday ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And did he come ?

A.—No.

Q.—Why not ?

A.—I do not know.

Q.—Did you not ask him the reason ? Is it not usual to do so when one accepts our invitation and fails to come ?

A.—I do not know that.

Q.—How long did you wait for him ?

A.—About half an hour.

Q.—He came in after Jal left ?

A.—Yes, soon after.

Q—And did he not himself explain why he was delayed ?

A.—No. The turmoil was too great for that.

Q.—Poor man ! Then, for aught we know he may have come hungry and been kept out of his just reward ? (Loud laugh.)

A.—No. We made him dine.

Q.—What ? Even in the midst of the turmoil ? (Peals of laughter.)

A.—A little after that.

Q.—And Mr. Erach advised you to go to the police-station and lodge the complaint ?

A.—Yes—No. I have not said so.

Q.—Say 'yes' or 'no'.

A.—No, he did not.

Q.—How could lone ladies think of all that, then ? You have said, witness, that you are lone ladies and have nobody to help you, you remember.

A.—We put our heads together and decided it.

The Magistrate :—And yet there was no breaking of skulls ? (Convulsive laughter.)

Q.—Is it true that you sent Roshan to school on her last birthday ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Did you send Sherbanoo to school on her birthdays ?

A.—I don't remember.

Q.—Say 'yes' or 'no'.

A.—No.

Q.—And why not, pray ?

A.—Because she was not like Roshan.

Q.—What do you mean by not like Roshan ?—Not so handsome or not so good as Roshan ?

A.—Not so naughty or troublesome.

Q.—Then it was a punishment for being naughty and troublesome ? Was it ?

A.—Not quite that. She was particularly provoking that morning, and so also was—

Q.—Finish your sentence, witness. You have said, so also was—who was that other party ?

A.—Her father.

Q.—The same person who is your husband and the father

of your elder daughter ? (Loud laugh.)

A.—You know it is so.

Q.—And what was the provocation that they both gave you ?

A.—I wanted her to say the *patet* and when I blamed her for not doing it, her father sided with her.

The Magistrate :—And so you ordered the father to school also. Likely enough to a boy school. Was it a High School or an Anglo-Vernacular one ? (The laughter was so great that it had to be suppressed. The witness's temper was up. She growled and glared from the Advocate to His Worship and from His Worship to the Advocate.)

Q.—What has been your opinion of Jal's general behaviour ?

The witness remained quiet ; whereupon the Magistrate warned her to answer the question.

A.—Not very good.

Q.—Then was it good ?

A.—It may have been so or may not. If you want me to give my opinion of your behaviour, it is very impertinent and impudent.

The Magistrate :—Witness, you should not insult the Advocate. If you were not of the gentler sex I should have asked you to apologize.

Q.—You must tell me, witness, your opinion of Jal's general behaviour.

A.—I had no good opinion of it.

Q.—Why not ?

A.—Because he once struck a class-fellow for giving him a nickname and knocked out two of his teeth. (Laughter.)

Q.—In your opinion it was a bad action ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And what had your husband to say to it ?

A.—Like himself he said it was very brave of him to do so.

The Magistrate :—And you were kind enough not to give him a slap for it. (Prolonged chuckling.)

Q.—Is that all you know against Jal ?

A.—No. A great deal more. But I don't want to be hard.

Q.—But you will harm your case if you don't let the court know all ?

A.—Well then, I don't remember it all now.

Q.—Will you remember it to-morrow and bring a list of all that you know against him with the help of your elder daughter and Mr. Erach ?

A.—No. I don't want to do it. The boy has been very troublesome and very quarrelsome. He runs after my daughter Roshan and puts all sorts of undesirable notions into her head, though I have frequently warned him not to do it.

Q.—And yet you pressed him to dine with you ?

A.—Yes. Only once in a way when Roshan was away.

Q.—Then it was the first and the last time he was so invited ?

A.—Yes, it was the first time but I did not know then it was to be the last time.

Q.—You just said that he puts all sorts of undesirable notions into Roshan's head. What are those notions ?

A.—He wants her to marry him and advises her not to say the *patet pashe-i-mani.*[1]

Q.—Why does Jal give her this advice ?

A.—He says that that prayer is meant for sinners, who may want to repent of their sins and not for young boys or girls.

Q.—Do you not think he is right ?

A.—No.

Q.—Why do you think so ?

A.—Because refractory and disobedient children are nothing else but sinners.

Q.—In your own sight or in the sight of God ?

A.—In the sight of both.

Q.—Do you say the *patet* yourself ?

A.—No. Just because I am not a sinner.

[1] Prayer of penitence.

Q.—Who says that?—Your husband, your elder daughter, or Mr. Erach? There must be a third party to judge of it. Perhaps they all three say it?

A.—I am not a sinner; I know I am not a sinner.

Q.—Is not she a sinner who is on notoriously bad terms with her husband and punishes a little daughter for imaginary sins?

The witness gnashed her teeth and struck her fist against the witness-box.

"Your Worship," she said, "I request you to warn that man; he is insulting me."

The Magistrate:—He is not insulting you. He is quite within his rights. I shall certainly check him when he is not so.

Q.—How long has your servant Rama been with you?

A.—I don't remember the exact period but it may be about three years.

Q.—Have you no reason to suspect him of the theft?

A.—None whatever. He is very trustworthy.

Q.—You must have intentionally left a purse on the table or kept the door of a cupboard open at times and tried him?

A.—No. That I have not.

Q.—Then, why do you take him to be trustworthy?

A.—Because I have not known him to steal anything yet.

Q.—Why should he not have been guilty of stealing the articles for the theft of which you have charged the accused?

A.—I don't think he did it.

Q.—Have you no reason to suppose that he helped Jal to do it? Why should the two not have combined?

A.—Such could not have been the case.

Q.—Why do you think so?

A.—Because I have perfect faith in the man's honesty.

Q.—But he may have stolen some things unbeknown to you?

A.—I do not think so; for if he had I should have missed them.

Q.—Are you in the habit of leaving the doors of your cupboards ajar?

A.—No.

Q.—Then why was that particular cupboard left open that day?

A.—It was an oversight.

Q.—Then it was the first time such a thing happened?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you usually set aside particular ornaments to wear on particular days?

A.—No.

Q.—Then why did you do it on that day?

A.—I did it to suit my own convenience.

Q.—What convenience? Charging Jal with the theft?

A.—No. I thought I would not get time to do it later on in the day.

Q.—Who was with you when you set aside the ornaments on the day of the alleged theft?

A.—My daughter Sherbanoo.

Q.—Was she not with you till you finished it?

A.—Yes. She was.

Q.—Then you mean to say that she also forgot to lock the door of the cupboard?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And you must have punished her for that serious offence, if not on the same day the next day? (Loud laughter.)

A.—No, I did not.

Q.—Why did you not?

A.—Because the mistake was as much mine as hers.

Q.—Then you should have inflicted some punishment on yourself or got some one to do it for you, say Mr. Erach? (Laughter again.)

A.—I did not do that.

Q.—But some penance was necessary. You must have repeated the *patet pashe-i-mani* ten times over that day at least, by way of penitence? (Laughter.)

Q.—What is your opinion of Miss Thriti Patel ?

A.—I don't think anything of her.

Q.—Witness, you must be more clear. Did you think her capable of assisting in a theft or of keeping possession of stolen property ?

A.—How could I know that she was capable of doing it until she did it ?

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, we have not charged the second accused with helping in the thiaft. We have charged her with receiving and retaining stolen praperty.

The Magistrate :—You are right, Mr. Khatkhate. But the learned Counsel does not allude to any particular theft. He has merely asked a general question.

Q.—You know that the second accused is totally blind ?

A.—I am told so.

Q.—Then you are not certain about it ?

A.—I cannot be certain, because I have not tried her or have no means of deciding it.

Q.—Then she is never with you ?

A.—No, almost never.

Q.—Then why did you invite her to dine with you on that particular day ?

A.—For the same reason that I invited Jal.

Q.—And what was that reason ?

A.—They were both very unfriendly towards us and I wanted to see if we could be friends.

Q.—Was that the only way to make friends with them ? Would it not have been better to have let them remain in the same house with you and for the same rent ?

A.—Perhaps it would have been but I could not afford to do it.

Q.—But you are rich in your own possessions ; are you not ?

A.—I have just enough to live upon.

Q.—Besides Meher Villa, you have two other properties worth about fifty thousand rupees each ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Would you accept it that Thriti is entirely blind on the certificate of eminent physicians ?

A.—What have I got to do with that ?

Q.—If she be entirely blind, then would it not be possible that some one may have put those jewels in her cupboard without her knowing anything about it ?

A.—I cannot give an opinion in that matter. It is a question for doctors and detectives.

Q.—Have you ever felt inclined to withdraw the charge you have brought against the accused after the proceedings were instituted ?

A.—I have never thought over the matter.

Q.—Did any one advise you to do it ?

A.—No.

Q.—Would you do it if the court allow you to do it now ?

A.—I must have time to think over it.

Q.—But you have said you did not want to be hard against the accused. Would you not do it now that the jewels are recovered ?

A.—Yes, if the court allow me to do it.

Q.—Then why do you not apply for the court's permission ?

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, the Advokiat has no right to put such questions to the witness. He is forcing aadmissions from her.

The Magistrate :—You are a day late for the fair, Mr. Khatkhate. If there has been any forcing of admissions it has already been done. (Laughter.)

On this the Advocate did not press his last question.

Q.—Are you aware of the Rent Act that has lately been introduced in Bombay ?

A.—Yes, I am.

Q.—Do you not know that under that Act you cannot ask the accused either to pay a higher rent or to vacate the quarters they occupy in your house until the expiration of the time provided

for in the Act ?

A.—I do not know anything about it.

Q.—Then I tell you that under that Act you cannot ask the accused to do either, if the accused choose to stand on their rights ?

A.—Let them do it then ; and I shall act as I may be advised.

The Magistrate :—But you cannot harbour thieves in your house. It would be too dangerous for the safety of your lives and property. (Loud laugh.)

Q.—Does your husband contribute to the household expenses ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What amount ?

A.—Rupees one hundred per month.

Q.—Are you sure it is not more ?

A.—Yes, I am sure.

Q.—But if your own account book show it, what then ?

A.—Then I would say that my husband is another thief ; he has stolen the book.

Mr. Aga here gave an account book to the Magistrate and requested His Worship to admit it as evidence.

" Your Worship," he said, pointing to certain entries in the book, " will see from these entries, which are in the handwriting of the witness now in the box, that Mr. Ardeshir is contributing rupees 150 per month towards the household expenses."

The Magistrate asked the Interpreter to hand the book to the witness.

" Witness," he asked, " are not the entries which the Interpreter points out to you made in your own handwriting ? "

A.—I cannot say.

The Magistrate :—Then you must look at them carefully and say 'yes' or 'no'. You remember you are on oath here ?

The witness after some hesitation:—Yes. But the book has been stolen.

The Magistrate :—Then you may bring a separate charge of theft for that against your husband. (Laughter.)

Mr. Aga :—Are you sure Mr. Erach was not in your house all the while that Jal was with you on the 3rd day of the current month ?

A.—I am sure he was not.

Q.—Then you still persist that he came to your quarters after Jal left ?

The witness grew pale but said, " Yes, I do."

" Your Worship," said the Advocate, " with your permission I shall move evidence to prove that the witness is telling another lie."

The witness was here seen to grow white and pale as a sheet.

" Yar Worrorship," said Mr. Khatkhate, " the witness must be a *bona fide* one."

The Magistrate :—The Court will see to that.

The name of one Huseinbi Mahomed Munshi was then called out by the court-crier. A middle-aged, respectable-looking Mahomedan *dasi* or ayah, very simply but very neatly clad, put in her appearance. Being for the first time in a law court she looked considerably frightened and scared ; she sobbed aloud when she was in the witness-box.

" Allah, Allah ! " she cried, " that I should be alive to see this day ! That I should have consented to be here to-day ! "

The Magistrate:—You need not be afraid, my good woman. You have only to swear by this Koran-i-Sherif [1] which the Interpreter is handing you and swear that you will tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Allah will bless you for that, don't you think so ?

The oath having been administered, the witness was calm. She dried her eyes with the end of her white cotton *sari*. Being reassured and comforted by the sight of the Koran she now stood quite firm and erect.

Mr. Aga:—What is your name, my good woman ?

A.—Huseinbi Mahomed Munshi.

Q.—What is your age ?

[1] The sacred book of the Mahomedans.

A.—About forty.

Q.—What are you ?

A.—I am a *dasi* in Bai Meherbanoo Dalal's family.

Q.—How long have you been so ?

A.—At least twenty years.

Q.—What is your husband ?

A.—He is a Munshi or teacher in a Mahomedan primary school.

Q.—Do you remember the 3rd day of the current month ?

A.—Yes, I do.

Q.—Remember it quite vividly ?

A.—Why not ? I am not very old and my memory is not bad.

Q.—You remember the eventful occurrences of that day ?

A.—Oh that I should have lived to see that day ! I would give ten years of my life if I could save little Jalbaba and Thritibai from disgrace.

Q.—But how do you know they are to be disgraced ?

A.—Because they have been brought to this *Adalat* (court). My poor father had bitter experience of it. He used to tell me, Huseinbi, rather than see the inside of an *Adalat*, go to *Jinnat* (heaven) and be gathered to your forefathers ten years earlier.

The Magistrate :—But what if you leave the court with a different experience, my good woman ?

Answer accompanied by a low obeisance :—Then I shall thank you, my lord, and the Allah for guiding you rightly.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, I would ask you to restrict this evidence to the purpose in view as much as possible.

Mr. Aga :—You then know all that happened on that day at your *Baisaheb's* house ?

A.—Yes, every inch of it.

Q.—Do you know when Mr. Erach Aga came in on that day ?

A.—Yes, he came in at nine o'clock.

Q.—How do you know it was nine o'clock ?

A.—Because I was in the hall when he entered it and I

heard Sherbanoo telling him that it was nine o'clock then and he had promised to come at eight.

Q.—Did she ask him why he was late?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And what did he say?

A—He said he had gone bazaring for them and then direct to his house and had a bath before he came to us.

Q.—Will you tell us, witness, all that happened afterwards, as well and as truthfully as you may remember it?

A.—As Allah is my witness, I will say nothing but the truth, though it will go to my heart,—kill me to do it.

She then raised her voice, wrung her hands and cried bitterly, "O my *Baisab*, O *Chhota-Bibi*,[1] it must be an evil day, it must be *Shaitan* that misled you so." Her voice then changed; she turned suddenly round in the box as if preparing to leave it.

"No, Sir," she cried vociferously, "your pardon; but I shall say nothing more. Surely you have not brought me here to work their destruction. You want to have your *murghi* (fowl) cut by my hands but I shall not do it."

The Interpreter approached the woman and after some difficulty succeeded in persuading her to be calm. There was another outburst of tears which soothed and solaced her.

"My good woman," said the Magistrate, "I see your difficulty. You don't want to say anything that might harm your *Baisahebs*. But you do not seem to understand that by your telling the truth you will do them a service. By keeping back the truth you will defeat the ends of justice and harm their interests."

"So be it then, Sir," said the woman. "After *Chhota Bibi* had questioned Erach Sheth they both went into her room. I was asked to carry Erach Saheb's breakfast there. 'Huseinbi,' Sherbanoo said to me, 'you are always obedient; see that you don't

[1] Young lady.

tell any one that Erach Sheth is here. Don't tell it now or hereafter not even to your husband.' I was in the cook-room till past one o'clock and left it but only once to carry Erach Sheth's *khana* into Sherbanoo's room. On hearing loud voices in the dining-room I went there and found the *Bara* and *Chhota Baisahebs*, Erach Sheth and Rama, all talking together. I was then told that a box of valuables was stolen from the cupboard and that Jalbaba had stolen it. I told them I could not believe it. They replied that I was mad and that I would be convinced when they saw Jal to his fate."

Q.—Do you know anything more?

A.—No, Sir. For Allah's sake let me go now. You have made me lose my service. I shall now be a burden on my poor husband.

Q.—Will your husband blame you for telling the truth?

A.—No, he would have blamed me, aye, turned me out if I had told an untruth or remained silent. It is for his sake and for the sake of that book there (pointing to the Koran) that I have done it.

There were fresh tears and a chorus of murmur and whisper went round in the court.

"Mr. Khatkhate," said the Magistrate, "do you want to cross-examine the witness?"

The learned individual so addressed scratched his forehead, took a big pinch of soothing snuff from his time-honoured heirloom of a tiny little box and said rather ruefully.

"Yar Worrorship, I don't think I will do it."

Huseinbi was then allowed to go.

The Magistrate here said he would postpone further hearing if Mr. Aga had done with Meherbanoo. Mr. Aga having replied that he wanted her no more the proceedings were adjourned.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BETROTHED AND THEIR BOOMS

" Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned."

CONGREVE.

THE day of the next hearing of the case against Jal and Thriti was a red-letter day in the history of law courts. It was known far and near that a scene of a most exciting and interesting nature would be enacted in Mr. Modi's court on that day. The event would be an unprecedented one in living memory. A fair fiancée was to be cross-examined by her fiance. It would be like a century scene, a scene which might take a century to occur again, a scene to form the soul of a cinema or of a tragedy. The newspapers of the previous week were thrilled and thrilling on the subject.

Long before the court-hour the court-room was seized with large concourse of people. There was unbounded excitement and expectation, so much so that even the Magistrate was astounded. Briefless barristers and even 'briefful' came condescendingly to witness the affray. Their curiosity was on a par with that of other small fries of the profession of which there were not a few.

Mr. Khatkhate felt particularly elated for was he not the fair fiancée's own man of law? Was he not there to extend his strong arm of the law and to spread out his legal wings over the fair fighter? There was only one regret and that was that he could not exchange places with Mr. Modi. Oh! How he longed to see that day! He would appease his gods and goddesses, his Dianas and his deities as he had never done before.

And did not Mr. Modi the Magistrate feel flattered? He

would not be a man if he did not. He looked round, looked straight, looked back, looked on one side and looked on the other, smiled on one bar-at-law, gave a knowing look to another, nodded to one police officer and gave an approving smile to another. All this while he was fidgeting among his books and papers and was but gaining time under pretence of arranging them. He intentionally let a book fall once on the ground to draw the attention of a Parsi lady in high pose who was busy talking to a young Hindu barrister. The eyes of the fair lady, whose attention he was anxious to draw, and his, met. He was a bachelor at forty-five and she was a spinster at forty. The one was sweet on the other and yet both kept each other at bay, each thinking that the other should be the first to propose. This chase of 'trace and catch me not' has made many a grown-up couple grow older and live single for ever. The possibility of the young Hindu barrister stealing a march on himself scared the colour from Mr. Minocher Modi's face. Such doings are not uncommon in these days of headlong cosmopolitanism and comingling of races.

There is, however, an end to everything and so the indulgence which Mr. Modi had allowed himself in his Magisterial capacity once in a way also came to an end. Like the books and the papers on his table he settled himself in his seat and asked silence to be proclaimed. The cries of *cheep*, *cheep*, and silence, silence, were drowned midst the larger cry of Sherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal. The *banoo* looked for, made her entry in the witness-box. She looked about her defiantly, put both her hands over the railing and stood firm as a rock. There was cannon to right of her, cannon to left of her, cannon in front of her, volley and thunder. She was quite prepared to meet them with cannons of her own. The director-general of the enemy's operations, he bearing the ever fresh name of the invincible Jamshed of Persian fame, confronted his plighted Amazon and opened the battery.

Q.—You remember the 3rd day of the current month ?

A.—I suppose I do ; I am not so forgetful.

Q.—I want you to say 'yes' or 'no,' please.

A.—Well then, yes.

Q.—You remember the answers that you gave to your pleader and to His Worship when you were examined by your pleader?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And you also remember the day of the Toddy party at Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji's?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You said in reply to your pleader's question that your relations with the accused until the day of the alleged offence were—remember, witness, I am repeating your own words taken from His Worship's notes of your evidence, were very friendly on your side and very unfriendly on theirs. Will you give the court concrete instances of these?

A.—I cannot remember them all at once.

Q.—But you have just said that you are not so forgetful?

A.—Yes. But I am not so tiresome as some people are.

Q.—You will be tiring the court soon enough if you do not give direct replies to direct questions. I want you to give me concrete instances of friendliness on your part and unfriendliness on the part of the accused.

A.—I gave instances of that when replying to my pleader's questions.

Q.—Those were mere allegations, unsupported by fact or witnesses on your side. You must now give instances on which the court can rely.

A.—To put an end to constant bickerings we thought it right to ask them to vacate. Instead of giving up peaceful possession of their rooms they have fostered and fumigated nothing but quarrel and scandal.

Q.—And what were those quarrels and scandals?

A.—They abused and insulted us on their mother's *patherna*.[1]

Q.—Whom do you mean by 'they'? There were only two ladies in the family and one of them was dead. The dead lady could not have abused you?

A.—Yes. But the daughter did it for herself and her friends supported her.

Q.—Who were the friends?

A.—Dinbanoo and Shirin Bahadurshah and Mrs. Mehelooji and some riff-raffs.

Q.—Are you sure they were all three present there?

A.—As far as I remember.

Q.—But then do remember and say 'yes' or 'no'.

A.—Surely you are not a dictator-general. You can dictate to your wife when you are married, not to me.

The Magistrate:—Witness, you must stop this rudeness unless you wish me to fine you. It is unladylike.

"Then I request Your Worship," said the witness, "to ask him to behave gentlemanlike."

"He is doing nothing that an Advocate is not entitled to do," said the Magistrate.

Mr. Aga:—Are you sure that Mrs. Bahadurshah, her daughter Shirin and Mrs. Mehelooji attended the *patherna* of the late Bai Jerbanoo Patel on the day on which her obsequies were carried to the Tower of Silence? Say 'yes' or 'no', please.

A.—Oh, you are pleasing me now. Then I will please you and say 'yes'. (Laughter.)

Mr. Aga:—Your Worship will kindly take a note of this. I will prove *alibis* to show that the three ladies alluded to were not present on the first day's *patherna* ceremony of Bai Jerbanoo. I will prove that the Bahadurshahs were not in Bombay on that day; I will also prove that they were not then acquainted with Bai Jerbanoo and her family. The acquaintance commenced after

[1] Ladies' gathering at funeral ceremonies.

her decease. As to Mrs. Mehelooji, she was too ill to attend on the first day and could do so with great difficulty on the third.

The Magistrate:—Mr. Khatkhate what means this constant rising and sitting? It distracts my attention. What makes you so fidgety to-day? I hope you have not come here with an empty stomach.

"Yar Worrorship," replied the learned limb of the law, "there are *makdas* (bugs) in this chair. They have sipped half a *seer* of my blood." (Loud laugh.)

"But you can surely kill them with your legal ammunitions," said the Magistrate. (Loud laugh.)

"Yar Worrorship, with yar permission I shall ask the *chaprasi* to give me another chair."

Whilst the *chaprasi* changed the chair, Mr. Khatkhate begged to know if the questions just asked by the Advocate were relevant or had any bearing on the evidence. The Magistrate replied that Mr. Khatkhate had better consult his copy of the Law of Evidence; he seemed to have outgrown it. There was considerable tittering among the bar and great chuckling among the lay audience, which made Mr. Khatkhate drop back into his *makda*-less chair quite disgusted and disarmed. He wanted to say something that would appeal to the bar and leave a lasting mark in the footprints of time. But here was a damper. But never mind, he thought, he was a lawyer and would not lag behind.

Mr. Aga to the witness:—Witness, what other instances can you give of friendliness on your side and unfriendliness on the side of the accused?

A.—They kept the dead body of Bai Jerbanoo in the house longer than usual, which is highly dangerous in times of epidemics.

Q.—Will you please say at what hour Bai Jerbanoo died and when her body was removed?

A.—She died at twelve noon on a Wednesday but her body was

not removed until eight of the morning on the next day.

Q.—What did the poor lady die of ?

A.—I do not know.

Q.—But as a very friendly and close relative living under the same roof, should you not have known it or inquired about it ?

Mr. Khatkhate seeing the danger at once rose and objected to the question. On the Magistrate overruling him he bumped back into the chair.

A.—That was my own business.

Q.—But I want you to prove your friendliness ?

A.—I did inquire and was told that it was influenza or something like it.

Mr. Aga to the Magistrate :—Your Worship, here is a certificate from a qualified medical practitioner to show that Bai Jerbanoo died of mental trouble and general debility unattended by fever of any kind.

The Magistrate noted it.

Q.—How long was Jerbanoo ill ?

A.—I don't know.

Q.—Did you ever go to see her ?

A.—I was not well and I could not do it.

Q.—What were you suffering from ? Was it influenza ? (Roars of laughter during which the witness's face contorted and as before she stamped her foot on the ground.)

Q.—Is it not usual amongst our community to keep a dead body in the house sometimes for twenty-four hours ?

A.—It may be so. But in this case it was not necessary. Besides it is opposed to the tenets of our religion.

Q.—How do you know it was not necessary ?

A.—Because they gave us no good reason for it, except that they had no one to manage things for them with dispatch.

Q.—Could you not help them ?

A.—How could we ? We are not used to it.

Q.—You just said that the keeping of dead bodies in the house for nearly twenty-four hours is opposed to the tenets of your religion. Have you made a study of your religion ?

A.—You are trying my patience too far. What have you got to do with what I have studied and what not ?

Q.—But you must say 'yes' or 'no'.

A.—Yes, I have read a little of it.

Q.—And it is that reading that has taught you to be so religiously overfriendly ? Is it not ? (Laughter.) Have you any more instances to give ?

A.—Yes. On the day of the Toddy party they would not go with us to Mr. Mehelooji's but went with some one else.

Q.—Did you invite them to go with you ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—With whom was the invitation sent ?

A.—I do not remember.

Q.—So that is the only thing you forget ? (Laughter.) Then you will tell me who escorted you to the party ?

A.—I don't remember.

Q.—But I will prove that it was Mr. Erach Aga ?

A.—It may be so. What if he did ?

Q.—Nothing more or less than that you are more friendly to him than to the accused. Have you any more instances ?

A.—Yes. They are setting Mr. Ardeshir and us at cross-purposes. He is all on their side and not on ours. He is constantly annoying us for their sake.

Q.—So it is an old feud and perhaps you have given cause to Mr. Ardeshir to side with them. But who is this Mr. Ardeshir ? We must make sure of his identity. (Loud laugh.)

A.—You know who he is. He is a man with two eyes, two ears and a nose.

Q.—I know that. But how is he connected with you ? Is he the same person who is the author of your being ?

A.—Unfortunately he is. (Hilarity.)

Q.—Have you got any other instance to give ?

A.—Yes. On Roshan's birthday the accused concealed her in their quarters when she returned from school earlier than she should have done.

The Magistrate :—So Roshan formed part and parcel of the stolen property ? (Loud laugh.)

Mr. Aga :—It is a wonder she was not found in the jewel-box. (Vociferous laughter.)

Q.—Well, witness, what if they kept her there ? Was it not a friendly act? Did they not help you? You wanted to keep the girl out of the house for the whole of the day by way of punishment.

A.—But we wanted her to be at school, not conceal herself in other people's quarters.

Q.—You must have avenged yourself for that ?

A.—That is no business of yours.

Q.—Certainly, it is the business of certain people only ; you ladies, for instance. (Loud laugh.)

Q.—Besides unfriendliness on the part of the accused you said something about scandal. What is that scandal? Were the accused scandalizing you ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And their mother too ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And what was that scandal ? Was it one or many ?

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship will certainly not allow this question. Scandals are often unfounded. And if the witness be made to repeat them it would be only sarculating them.

Mr. Aga :—Then the witness should not have referred to them.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, I think we had better not go into

the question of scandal. It had better be kept out of court. (Laughter.)

Q.—When you went to invite the accused on the 3rd day of the current month you have said that they abused you ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And yet you pressed the invitation ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Did you tell your mother and Mr. Erach that they abused you ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—When did you tell them ?

A.—As soon as I went up.

Q.—What time was it when you went up ?

A.—About ten o'clock.

Q.—You are sure of that ?

A.—Yes. Almost. It may be a few minutes more or less.

Q.—But you have said before and so has your mother that Mr. Erach did not come to your house on that day until Jal had dined and left yours ?

The witness looked confused.

"Your Worship, I hope you will take a note of this ; it is very important," said Mr. Aga.

Q.—Did not your mother and Mr. Erach then object to the second accused going up to your quarters at all ?

Mr. Khatkhate was here heard to cough audibly, so much so that it made the witness to veer round and face him.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Khatkhate, take care of yourself you seem to have a bad cough.

The witness :—I—I made a mistake. I did not tell it to them as soon as I went up. I informed them of it after the theft was discovered.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Hanar, I mean Yar Worrorship, will kindly maadify the note. It is clear that the witness was con-

fused and made a mistake.

The Magistrate :—I am sorry I cannot do it, Mr. Khatkhate. You have yourself said that the witness is a highly educated lady ; she could not have misunderstood the Advocate.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Then Yar Worrorship will make a note of the last reply of the witness.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—After you proffered the invitation did you go or had you occasion to go to the accused's quarters again ? Think well before you answer.

A.—No.

Q.—Are you sure ? Remember, you are on oath here and will be charged with perjury if you tell an untruth. You know the punishment for that.

A.—I have said that I did not go again to the accused's quarters on that day and I hold to it.

Q.—And it was not you that carried that case of missing valuables to Miss Thriti's quarters ?

A.—Why should I do it ?

Q.—It is for you to say that. Perhaps you wanted to present them to your cousin to seal your friendship. (Loud laugh.)

A.—No, I did nothing of the kind.

Q.—You remember the day of the Toddy party ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—When the Toddy tree fell down the second accused was caught under it ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—She had to be carried to Mr. Mehelooji's bungalow ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Did you go to the bungalow and see that she was all right before you left ?

A.—No.

Q.—Then what did you do ?

A.—I left for home with my mother.

Q.—Did any one else leave with you ?

A.—Yes, Mr. Erach.

Q.—Did Miss Roshan go with you ?

A.—No.

Q.—Why did you not take her with you ?

A.—Because we did not choose to.

Q.—You were perhaps afraid she would be unsafe company, as she might carry tales. (Laughter.) Witness, I will trouble you with another question if you please. Who is your family doctor ?

A.—Dr. D. M. De Silva.

Q.—How long has he been so ?

A.—About two years.

Q.—Who was your family doctor before that ?

Mr. Khatkate was here heard to cough again. The witness taking up the cue stood uncertain for a moment or two. She spoke when the question was pressed.

A.—I don't remember.

Q.—Was he not Dr. J. Jeejeebhoy who has his rooms in the street where your house is situated ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Why did you give up the good offices of that doctor ?

A.—Because he was doctoring us and not you.

Q.—Did you not give him up because he was also family doctor to the accused ?

The witness looked considerably confused but on another cough from Mr. Khatkhate she answered, " No ".

Mr. Aga took out a letter from his pocket and handing it to the witness asked, " Is this not your own handwriting ? "

A.—And what if it is ?

Q.—You must say, ' yes ' or ' no '. If you say ' no ', we can get very respectable people to swear that it is yours.

A.—Yes. The handwriting is mine.

Mr. Aga then read out the letter to the court :—

" Dear Dr. J. Jeejeebhoy,

Mother bids me to say that we shall not require your services as a family doctor after 31st December next, and you will kindly consider our yearly arrangement as terminated from that day. I entirely agree with mother in the step that she has taken. It will not do for you to attend at the Patel's and to be at ours also. It is true we are so closely connected but you know we do not like them. We are very sorry to dispense with your good offices but it is of your own seeking, as you would not give them up.

I enclose a cheque for your dues.

Yours sincerely,

Sherbanoo Dalal."

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship will doubtless see that the Patel family alluded to is the family of the accused. We shall get the doctor to come and swear to it if the witness says that the family referred to is different.

The Magistrate :—Then you should ask the witness about it. If she differ, then we can get the doctor to tell us what family is alluded to.

Mr. Aga :—Witness, will you please tell us whom you mean by the Patels in this letter ?

A.—I meant Pheroze Patel's family.

Q.—The family of the accused ?

A.—Yes.

The encounter between the betrothed and the booming of the guns was here over. We will leave the reader to decide who was the victor and who the vanquished. If he is not able to do so, he must await His Worship's decision. The witness was clever but when she left the box her countenance did not wear the same hue and aspect which it did when she entered the box. The almost audible remarks of the audience were anything but consoling. They added fuel to the fire. She beckoned to her pleader, and

when aside she said something to him in tones which though low were slightly raised at the end. Those near them said they had clearly caught her saying, " Mr. Khatkhate, you are a dunce; we must have another man : Mother was a fool to have you."

It was five o'clock, which was the hour for the court to disperse. The Magistrate said he was very anxious to push on with the case and finish it. If Messrs. Aga and Khatkate had no objection he would finish up Mr. Erach's cross-examination. Speaking for himself he did not mind sitting up somewhat late. The learned individuals having agreed the name of Erach Aspendiar Aga was called out. Did the spectators leave? If they had it would have been a mercy; for the crowding and stuffing was indeed very great. But they stuck to their seats like leeches. The excitement was in no way underwrought.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—Witness, I am sorry you are not looking so well as you did when you were examined by your pleader. I hope you are not ill. (The witness remained contemptuously silent.)

The audience understood what the Advocate meant; for the witness was looking very crestfallen and confused. The arrogance and insolence which had so distinguished him on his first appearance in the court were entirely absent now.

" Witness," proceeded the Advocate, without waiting for a reply, " you remember all that you stated when your lawyer examined you ? "

The witness's condition had not improved and he murmured, " Yes, Sir,"—which caused a smile all round. The next moment he seemed to rally.

Q.—You remember the 3rd day of the current month ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You remember all that occurred on the day of the Toddy party at Mr. Mehelooji's ?

A.—Yes. Everything upto the time that we left.

Q.—Whom do you mean by ' we ' ?

A.—Myself, Meherbanoo, Shera and Roshan.

Q.—Who is Shera ?

A.—Did I say Shera ? I am sure I said Sherbanoo.

Q.—O, it does not matter. Only we wanted you to be respectful to a highly respectable lady. (Deafening laugh.) You have said before that all the while Jal was present at the complainants' quarters on the 3rd day of the current month you were not there. Was it not so ?

A.—What is the use of tormenting me in this way ? I have said so and it must remain.

Q.—But why not withdraw the statement if it was incorrect ?

A.—It was not incorrect.

Q.—But you must have read in the papers that Huseinbi, the witness, contradicted you ?

A.—I have read nothing of the kind. I don't read the newspapers regularly.

Q.—O, then you ought to. It would improve you vastly. But what if we tell you, witness, that Huseinbi said that you were at Meherbanoo's and concealed in Sherbanoo's room all the time that Jal was there ? What if we tell you that we accept Huseinbi's statement as correct ?

A.—Then you would be believing the word of a menial against the word of a gentleman.

Q.—Are you sure Miss Roshan was with you when you left Mehelooji's party ?

A.—Did I say she was ? If I did so it was a mistake. She did not go with us.

The Magistrate :—Witness, you are answering through the medium of the Interpreter, who is a very clever official and not likely to misinterpret you. Interpreting means time ; and you are adding to the trouble of the court by your prevarications. I would advise you to keep your head straight, for your own sake and for the sake of those whose cause you have espoused.

The witness seemed to wake up as if from a dream.

Q.—Do you remember your intentionally overturning a glassful of Toddy on the day of the Toddy party on the person of the second accúsed and spoiling her dress to spite her ?

A.—It was only an accident.

Q.—Did not some of the party tell you that you did it intentionally ?

A.—Yes ; but they were not right.

Q.—You are betrothed to the second accused ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Did you help her when she was caught underneath the falling tree and carried to the house almost senseless ?

A.—No ; she did not deserve it.

Q.—But you are her fiancé.

A.—Yes ; but I do not mean to be so any longer. Some body else is welcome to marry her ; if you like yourself.

The Magistrate :—Witness, you are impertinent.

Q.—Is it not true that you sent a telephone from Mehelooji's house to the mother of the accused, telling her that her daughter was dying and that she should come over to Mehelooji's at once ?

A.—Who says I did so ?

Q.—Say 'yes' or 'no'.

A.—There is no telephone in the quarters of the accused.

Q.—But there is one in the quarters of the complainants ?

A.—But the accused are not allowed to have access to it.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, the witness means to say that the complainants' telephone is for their own use and the telephone rules say that telephones are not to be used by others than those who pay for them.

The Magistrate :—It does not signify. What is of consequence is whether the witness sent a telephone message such as that mentioned by the Advocate to the complainants' house.

Mr. Aga to Erach :—Witness, did you send such a telephone or not ?

A.—No.

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, we have evidence to prove that a message such as that narrated by me was sent by the witness and communicated to the deceased Bai Jerbanoo not by any of her own servants but by the complainants' own ayah. Not only that but the witness was actually seen sending that telephone message by one of Mr. Mehelooji's servants.

The two servants referred to, who were present in the court, were then put in and they swore to the truth of the Advocate's statement. The witness and his pleader were dumbfounded.

Mr. Aga then asked the Interpreter to hand a particular letter which he drew from his pocket to the witness. It was the anonymous letter written by some one to Mr. Behman Bahadurshah.

Mr. Aga :—Witness, you have read that letter ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Did you ever see it before ?

A.—No. How could I ?

Q.—Do you recognize the handwriting ?

A.—No.

Q.—Is it not your own ?

Answer after a little hesitation :—No.

Q.—Just look at it again and see if it is not your own ?

The witness looked at the letter again and said, " No ".

The letter was then handed to the Magistrate.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, there are two points in the letter which you must explain to me. The writer tells Mr. Bahadurshah that the girl he has admitted into his house is unsuited morally and intellectually to cross its threshold. At the close of the letter he says that the person who introduced this girl into his house has committed a breach of faith and should not therefore be allowed admission into the house again. I want to know who this girl was and who recommended her to Mr. Bahadurshah.

Mr. Aga :—Miss Macgregor who is one of the witnesses for the accused was for a long time tutor to Mr. Bahadurshah's daughter Miss Shirin. When Miss Patel became blind the large-hearted Miss Macgregor resigned her situation and very kindly put in Miss Thriti Patel in her place, who did not till then know the Bahadurshahs. This did not suit the writer of the letter, who must be very anxious for reasons of his own, to see Miss Thriti wanting her bread.

The Magistrate :—But what is there to show that this letter was written by the witness now in the box ? He says that the handwriting is not his. How are you going to prove that it is his ? Besides why should the writer have attacked Miss Macgregor too ? If he were anxious that Miss Patel should not get the place he would have praised Miss Macgregor and recommended Mr. Bahadurshah to continue her services.

" Exactly, Your Worship," said Mr. Aga, " but the writer, or rather the persons who made him write the letter, were themselves anxious to secure Miss Macgregor's services. Enigmas apart, I mean to tell Your Worship that the witness wrote the letter at the instigation of the complainants. It was part and parcel of a plot to gradually win over Miss Macgregor on their side,"

The Magistrate :—What is there to show it ?

Mr. Aga :—This other letter here was written by the second complainant to Miss Macgregor. Your Worship will see that it bears the same date as the anonymous letter.

The letter handed to the Magistrate was the same that the reader has read in chapter XX.

" Yar Worrorship," said Mr. Khatkhate, " the second complainant's letter can-nat even by the widest stretch of imagination be linked with or be said to have any connection with the ana-anymous letter. It can-nat be admitted as iavidence. It is a letter written in the best interests of a child and for Miss Macgregor's own good."

The Magistrate :—Just as quinine is best administered under sugar coat. (Laughter). If you can bring forward evidence, Mr. Khatkhate, to show that the complainants were most favourably inclined and were always friendly to Miss Macgregor, I should be prepared to consider your argument. Can you do it?

Mr. Khatkhate :—I have no instructions on that head, Yar Worrorship.

The Magistrate :— Doubtless not. For if the complainants had been friendly to Miss Macgregor she would have accepted the post. As matters stand, however, she is a witness for the accused.

Mr. Khatkhate resumed his seat much disconcerted. Mentally he gave it up as a bad job. The second complainant's words, 'Mr. Khatkhate you are a dunce, etc.' rang and resounded in his ears. His pride was wounded and he felt very dejected. His reputation was, however, at stake and he thought the only way to save it was to make a speech at the end of the case which should in no wise fall in comparison with that of a Cicero or a Demosthenes.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, will you now prove the identity of the handwriting ?

Mr. Aga thereupon asked the Magistrate's permission to read another letter in the court. The Magistrate observed that Mr. Aga seemed to have a volley of them and was much relieved when told that there would be no more. The letter so read out ran as follows :—

" My dear Sheth Mehelooji,

I pen these lines to you in great hurry. I am in a serious scrape and want a couple of hundred rupees at least to get out of it. I must have it immediately if it is to be of any use to me. You will add one more to many obligations if you will kindly send two bank-notes of a hundred rupees each to me, properly sealed under a cover, with the bearer. This is

the third time I am applying to you for this kind of help and thinking you might decline to accede to my request this time I enclose an I O U of even date.

Yours ever obliged,
E. A. AGA."

" I would exhort Your Worship," said Mr. Aga, " to compare the handwriting in this letter with the handwriting in the anonymous letter and see if it is not the same."

The Magistrate :—I will do it if the witness says that the letter to Mr. Mehelooji which you have just read out is his own.

Mr. Aga :—The witness will very gladly do it, Sir, otherwise Mr. Mehelooji will press for an immediate return of all the three loans, the sum total of which comes to no less than one thousand rupees.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Mehelooji seems to be a little too free with his loans. He will ruin himself if he is not discreet.

On the letter being handed to the witness he admitted he was the writer thereof. The Magistrate compared the handwriting of the two letters and handed them to the Interpreter of the court. This official was an old hand and had a reputation in the matter. He said he had no doubt whatever that the anonymous letter was written by the same person who wrote the letter to Mr. Mehelooji.

Mr. Khatkhate then told the Magistrate that he objected very strongly to the two letters being admitted as evidence against Mr. Erach without expert opinion being taken.

The Magistrate :—Then we will have the High Court expert to give his opinion at the next hearing.

Mr. Aga here observed that the cross-examination of the witness was completed. There was only one more witness for the prosecution, the servant Rama. This man, Mr. Aga said, was practically turned inside out and so many admissions were drawn from him by His Worship in the course of his examination-in-chief that it was unnecessary to cross-examine him.

It was past seven of the evening when the court broke up.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE LIGHT AT LAST BREAKS

" Blush, folly, blush; here's none that fears
The wagging of an ass's ears,
Although a wolfish case he wears."

" Detraction is but baseness' varlet ;
And apes are apes though clothed in scarlet."

BEN JOHNSON'S *The Poetaster.*

" FULL oft we see cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly," has been well said by the great English poet. In the case of the mother and the daughter, Meherbanoo and Sherbanoo, whom the reader surely has not forgotten, it is difficult to decide whose was the cold wisdom and whose the superfluous folly. They were both so foolish and both so heartlessly cold. The question to decide then is, who was the greater fool of the two. Sure enough the mother ; for it was she that made the daughter. She proved that a fool at forty is a fool indeed.

" Look here, Meherbanoo," observed Sherbanoo, " I will have none of your nonsense, now. I will stand it no longer. There has already been enough mischief. Between you two, you and that fellow Erach there, you have made a complete mess of it. You put up that ass of a Khatkhate to make confusion worse confounded. It is a pretty kettle of fish now. You preached to me more than once against Erach ; and it's you that are now practically dancing the hornpipe with him. You ought to be ashamed at your age for doing it. Why, at times I think if I should not give him up to you. At times I think he would be a fitting husband for you, were you a widow."

" But, my dear,....."

" Don't my dear me, Meherbanoo ; I am no more dear to you than you are to me. We both have tried to sail together and have sailed adrift. I told you that the case was a ticklish one and that we should employ a better man. But you have always been for money. That man Erach should have known better. One against two, I could do nothing."

" But, my dear, I offered to withdraw after the prosecution was over but you would not hear of it."

" Yes ; because you two, fools that you were, would not understand that it was too late to withdraw. The law does not allow it for it is a police prosecution."

" Now don't be so wise, Shera. You think you know everything," said the male fool Erach, who was standing within earshot and had heard all that had passed. He thought he had only to speak and to vanquish his sweetheart. But he was mistaken. He had already lost considerable ground and was falling fast low in her estimation. The more Shera saw of him and Jamshed, the more the latter rose in it.

" You think you know all, Shera," continued Erach. " But we are wiser. It is not too late yet; *Maiji*, I mean your mother, and I, have decided....."

" To hang yourselves on that roadside tree yonder. Better you do that. Best you had done it before," roared the daughter.

" Shera, Shera," pleaded the mother. " You don't know what you are saying. You are mad."

" Not more than you two. I know you want to employ a barrister to cross-examine the accused's witnesses. It is a sham, a hoax. I tell you it will all fall flat. Aga is not less clever and besides it is all too far spoiled now to be improved. There is nothing for us but defeat, shame and degradation. We shall have to look small," Shera proceeded vehemently, stamping her foot on the ground. " We shall have to run away from Bombay. They will all carry the day ; and all through Jamshed, all through your not employ-

ing his equal if not a superior man."

"Oh! So that's the game," retorted Erach. "You are lost in love; you are taken with Jamshed. The glory of old Iran is to be revived. Why not say so plainly? Why not tell that man that you repent of your ways and are sorry for your sins? Why not– – –"; but he could not proceed.

He had known Shera long; and yet he did not know that it was not safe to exasperate her. She flew at him and gave him a box on his right ear, which would have done credit to an Amazon or a Joan of Arc. She was too much for her opponent. He had found in her a Tartar. He felt that to oppose her any further would be only to lose her favour altogether and to put it beyond pale of redemption. The mother stood petrified. The girl panted with rage and withdrew to a window to cool herself with the westerly breeze that was blowing in. She had never liked the breeze so much. It cooled her irate brows and her temples. Sigh upon sigh escaped her; it seemed as if her whole soul was crumbling and all the accumulated sin on it was about to wither and fall off. A new light seemed to be bursting in upon her. God had saved her before it was too late. He had not done it with her mother because "Man is man's A B C. There is none that can read God aright, unless he first spell man." Once more she sighed. She remembered something that she had read only a few days ago, something that she did not care for then but to which her mind eagerly reverted now:

"Speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul,
And waft a sigh from Indus to the pole."

Did the girl know of the revolution which was being wrought within her? Did she recognize the Great Hand that had commenced to work it? No; she did not. Would the revolution be complete? Would it end in a reformation?

And what did the mother and her visitor do in the meantime? The former took the latter by the hand and literally drag-

ged him to the opposite window. His looks were abject but appalling. He was meditating upon revenge. He was in doubt how to wreak it. He scowled and growled and not infrequently groaned. He would not hear his coadjutor or answer her questions. He was for skulking quietly away and for thinking it all out alone by himself but on second thought decided to remain. It would be folly to forego Shera or to let her slip out of his hands for was not his betrothal with Thriti practically broken off ?

" Erach, for Heaven's sake, do not take it on so," said the elder woman. She put her hand on his head and stroked it gently. " You know Shera but too well. We should have known where to stop but we overdid it. However, it does not matter. I know how to manage her. Time will teach you also how to do it. You are too wise to spoil the job just for that little—" box on the ear she was going to say but she wisely stopped. " You have seen Barrister Burjor ; have you ? He has agreed to appear ; hasn't he ? "

" No," growled Erach. " He says, it's a dirty case, a nasty concoction, a gross lie and he will not sully his hands with it."

" You are not exaggerating, Erach ? "

" To be sure, not. Those were his very words."

At that moment the mother looked towards the other window and saw her daughter quietly approaching them.

" Shera," she said, " Burjor says he has other engagements. His time is fully taken up and he is sorry he cannot spare any for us. What do you think of Nagarwalla ? He has just come out a full-fledged barrister."

" Look here, Meherbanoo ; I have nothing to do with your Nagarwallas or your Coorlawallas. I have washed my hands of the whole affair. I am so thoroughly sick of it. You may employ the man in the Moon or the Mars for aught I care. I am feeling feverish. I am afraid I am going to be seriously ill."

Then without waiting for a reply she turned her back on them and stalked out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV

PAIN BEGETS PENANCE—SHERA IN PAIN

"*Before the coming of a strong disease,*
Even in the instant of repair and health,
The fit is strongest."

SHAKESPEARE'S *King John.*

GOING to her room the first thing that Shera did was to lock herself in. The second thing was to throw herself on her bed and to bury her burning head under the pillows. The third thing was to turn over in the bed with her head pressed hard against her right hand and the pillows. The fourth thing was to turn over again and to toss about from right to left and left to right until she was too tired to do it any more. A strange uneasiness had overtaken her. She did not know her own mind or her own feelings. She was not a weak woman and she would not give way to weakness. Her mind went over a hundred things in a trice. She looked back into the long vista of her family history. She thought of her ancestors and felt that they had done nothing of which their descendants should feel ashamed. She traced their history and pondered over the good deeds, deeds of charity and love for their people, that they had wrought in ancient days. There was not a dark spot in their escutcheon. The history was as clear and lucid as crystal. Her mind then reverted to her own father. How could she judge of him? To sit in judgment upon him, she must sit in judgment upon her mother and upon herself for they were actors on the same stage and characters in the same play. Their attitude and action must reflect on one another. It was a damper and she stopped. Had she misjudged her father? Had she viewed her own actions and those of her

mother more lightly than they deserved? The thought was a torture and she abandoned it. It was Roshan that rushed to her mind next. Was she not her own sister? Had she behaved towards her as an elder ought? A shudder passed through her at this thought and she abandoned it also. Erach was the next that took possession of her mind. She had liked him, winked at his foibles, connived at his follies, aye, patted and pampered him, though she knew he belonged to another girl by right. Upto now she could not think of him otherwise than with tenderness and affection. She acted for him and when occasion required stood between him and his traducers. It was a strange feeling that she entertained for him. Was it what the novelists call love? Why did she like him? Perhaps because he had made her interests and those of her mother his own. Was she right in boxing his ears? The answer was, No. For, after all, he was but their tool. She must not have really liked him or loved him but she could see that he had liked and loved her in his own way. It was all hoity-toity, but not a hoax. "When remembrance racks the mind, pleasures but unveil despair."

Remembrance also oft starts the tear. Tears did rise to Shera's eyes. They were big, burning and biting. Woman-like there was a revulsion of feeling within her in favour of Erach. She was sorry for her unwomanly behaviour. She lay musing and quiet. We cannot say how long she might have been thus preoccupied. There was a knock at the door but she would not rise and open it. The handle was turned and the knocker entered. It was Meherbanoo. At sight of her the girl's anger rose again.

"What is it now?" she asked. "Is there to be no peace for me? Will you ever haunt me? Are you bent upon hunting me down? Had it not been for you, Meherbanoo, I would not have shown myself as I did to-day. These two months and more, you have forgotten yourself completely. You have forgotten your duty towards me—and—I will not say, your duty towards your husband but your duty towards yourself; to say nothing of the duty you owe to society. You have tied a young man to your apron-strings.

You have made him dance at your finger's end. You have driven with him to open places and to close ones; to airing-resorts and to theatres; cleared your pockets for him and for you at clearance sales. In the name of God, in the name of Justice, I ask, Meherbanoo, if what you have done and are doing still is right and fair. Are you not disgracing yourself? Do they not all talk of you as a married woman with a hanger-on? "

This was too much even for Meherbanoo. Her cheeks burned, her forehead furled and she burst forth unboundedly.

"Oh! Is it you, Sherbanooji, that are speaking so? Or is it the penitent ghost of your pernicious self? I did not know you could play the high lady so well when you chose. I should have known it. For, are not you Sher-Banoo?—Lady of the Land?—who hopes to be the landlady after me? Hope, hope on, my dear. It does not cost you anything and does not kill me. You are a paragon of virtue and all that is virtuous to-day. But you are not a paragon of beauty, to boot. Your sister tops you in that; and right too. For, God does not give horns to camels. You are an amazon without horns; you have set Erach's back up. He will doubtless carry the tale to your virtuous society. I wonder what they will think of it. But to me, *Baisaheb*, it's all a monstrous metamorphosis. Isn't it too much like the thief turning the accuser and trying to hang his associates? Is it not like the prelate preaching to the Pope? Whence trickles all that tirade? Sherbanoo, I have borne your whims and vagaries long enough and have treated them lightly. I have been a boor to the others so that I may bear with you and it is thus that you are repaying me. Shame, shame to you, Sherbanoo. You are trying to crush me but you forget I can crush you down like this."

She took up an empty match-box that lay by her on the table, put it under her foot and crushed it.

"You know, Sherbanoo, that it is not I that is dependant on you but it is you that owe everything to me. If I like I can

cut you off with a penny. You romped and roved with Erach and drew everybody's eye on you. You wanted to snatch Erach from Thriti. You said you cared not for the world or for what it said. You were singing to your own tune then ; you are now playing on your neighbour's harp. You have told me that you will stand by my no nsense no longer. It is now my turn. And I tell you I will tolerate none of yours. You may make yourself scarce from this house as soon as you like or can. Go to your father, go to your fiancé, or if you like it better go to Jericho or *Jehannam*."

Sherbanoo who had raised herself and sat in the bed during this virulent vituperation was staggered. She was at a loss what to say. Meherbanoo would not have been Meherbanoo if she were slow to notice it. She saw the strides she had made and the ground that she had covered. She quickly followed up her advantage.

"I came to your room to inquire how you were. You remember your saying to us that you were not feeling well. I came to see if you wanted anything and if I can be of help to you. I wonder if you would be as kind to your daughter, especially if she has your virtues. Come, come, Shera, I see you are not well ; you are excited; there is something that weighs heavily on your mind ; will you not tell it me?"

She drew closer and hugged her. Sherbanoo did not oppose. She was too ill to do it. But the elder woman did not fail to notice the shudder that crept over the younger woman's whole frame on her embrace.

"There is nothing on my mind ; nothing the matter with me. That wretched case has upset me. I wish we had not launched into it. But wishes are not horses. If you want me to leave your house, Meherbanoo, I shall do it," said the girl, who was irate again. "It would perhaps have been well, well for you, well for me, well for both of us, well for the others, if I had done it earlier. Rest assured, I will do it as soon as I am well. If I leave this house you will not see me in it again."

The keen-witted mother saw that it was for her to cool down

now. Perhaps she had gone further than she wished or expected to do. She must now change her tactics. She had not let Shera out of her sight even for a day and she could not bear the idea of her going out of it for ever.

"Excuse me, Shera," she said, "I have been hasty, perhaps unreasonable. But consider how you tried me. You are feverish : shall I send for the Doctor ? Come let me apply Cologne and cold water to your head."

"No, no, mother, if you have any pity for me leave me now, at least for a little while. If it be not too much trouble for you send my ayah here. Is Erach gone ? Tell him when he returns that—that—I am sorry. Sorry I struck him. If he wants revenge tell him to come here and box my ear in return. I want that correction very badly. I should have had it long ago. Now that I bethink me Erach is a coward. He should not have borne it so. Instead of growling and gazing at me like a cat or a cad he should have paid me out for it."

"I don't think so," said the senior woman. "Gentlemen never do that."

"Tush, tush, mother, there are no gentlemen, or for the matter of that gentlewomen in this house. It's a jungle ; and right enough there are junglies in it. It is a den of wild beasts."

"You rave, Shera. I must have the Doctor in. They shall not say I killed you."

Then without waiting for a reply Meherbanoo hurried out. Shera rose with difficulty and wrote out a short chit :

"Dear Miss Macgregor,

Will you do me the favour to come over here as soon as you conveniently can ? I am very ill. I don't know really why I am sending for you, or if I have any right to do so. But my hand has moved on mechanically. I want your help.

With many thanks in advance,

Sincerely yours.
Shera Dalal."

She put the note in an envelope, pasted it carefully and addressed it. Just then her ayah came in.

" Marjorie," she said, " I have a mission for you. Take this letter privately to Miss Macgregor and let nobody know you have done it."

The ayah then withdrew.

Just then the family Doctor came in with Meherbanoo. He felt her pulse, felt her head and hands, and felt her all over. Shera obeyed mechanically for by this time her senses had practically deserted her.

" What is it, Meherbanoo ? " asked the Doctor of the mother, beckoning her to a corner of that capacious room. "What is it ? What is the reason of this sudden rise in temperature ? I saw her passing by my rooms this morning ; she seemed to be in perfect health then. She has been usually so strong. Has there been an excitement, a sudden overstraining of the nerves ? Has she been violent or — or — has any one been violent to her ? Tell me everything if you want me to go to work properly."

Meherbanoo said that there had been a family scene that morning and then another and that Shera had excited herself without much cause for it. She had informed them then that she felt feverish. Her excitement was so great that she had actually struck Erach, who like a wise young man that he was, bore it all calmly.

The doctor thereupon returned to the patient, removed the thermometer that he had applied to her person, took it aside and looked at it. He looked very grave and without a word sat down at the table.

" Here are pills ; here are doses. Send for them immediately. I have instructed my man to dispense them at once. Here is a letter to Mrs. Mortimer, the nurse. Let your man take it to her at once. I have never seen Shera like this before. She seems to have practically collapsed. There must be something very heavy on her mind. Let her lie quiet ; give her not the slightest cause for

excitement if you care for her life."

Meherbanoo looked pale and frightened. The Doctor asked her to carry out his instruction s.

" Sherbanoo," he then said gently " what do you feel ? Won't you tell it me ? Have I not doctored you from childhood upwards ? "

Shera wanted to speak but she could not. The elderly Doctor put his hand over her mouth, as much as to say, don't try any further,—I only wanted to see if you could speak. Just then a young lady in an English gown and a straw hat walked in. She looked at the patient, looked at the Doctor and took in the situation at once. It was Magdalene. The Doctor was very pleased to see her.

" You see I am here, Sherbanoo," said Magdalene gently. " I see now what you wanted me for. I will not run away. You can tell me all that you want to when the fever is down."

Shera's eyes were gazing absently on Magdalene ; she took her hand and hers closed mechanically on it. The Doctor got a chair for Magdalene and she sat down beside the bed.

" I would not have sent for Mrs. Mortimer if I knew you were to be here. I don't like Shera's looks. I have never been so shaky before," said the Doctor. "Don't leave her I beg."

Meherbanoo entered with the medicines. She looked at Magdalene and stood aghast. What on earth could have brought her there ? she thought. Magdalene saw her embarrassment.

" Meherbanoo," she said, " I hope you are not displeased to see me here. My father is not well and I went to Dr. De Silva's to consult him. I was told the Doctor had just left for yours and I followed him. I am very sorry to find Sherbanoo so ill." She then stopped. She had told an untruth and prayed to God inwardly to pardon her. Meherbanoo did not believe a word of it. But she pretended to do it. She is so sly but I am a match for her, she thought.

The Doctor administered the medicines with his own hand and told Meherbanoo and Magdalene to gently undress Shera after he left and put her in an easy gown. He said he would return after a few hours and see how his patient was progressing. He then went out of the room. Meherbanoo followed him. In reply to her anxious inquiries he told her that the case was not so bad then, but that the times were so bad ! Things apparently trifling took no time to be serious. Meherbanoo had therefore better be careful. She should keep Magdalene there. She would nurse Shera better than Mrs. Mortimer.

CHAPTER XXXV

FATHER AND DAUGHTER TO THE FORE

" Our religion is love; 'tis the noblest and purest :
Our temple the Universe, widest and surest :
We worship our God through his works that are fair :
And the joy of our thoughts is perpetual prayer."

THE further hearing of the case was fixed for the next day. The next day dawned swiftly enough. To the anxious spectators, however, this little lapse of time seemed like a month. There was no dull period in the proceedings and the interest created did not flag at any stage. If anything it heightened at every step. At the last hearing it was a fight between a fiancé and his fiancée, and between a fiancé and another, who were not rivals in love. Erach had not crossed Jamshed Aga in love. The latter was only too willing to let the former take his fiancée off his hands. Like the path of true love the path of unrighteous love does not run smooth. In their case nature seemed determined to prove it. The scene at the last hearing was not ennobling though it was highly entertaining. The scene to be enacted to-day was highly ennobling if not so entertaining. This scene was to disclose the innocent and noble daughter of a good and noble father fighting in the front-row for fair play, fighting for all that is just and noble in humanity, fighting to vindicate the ends of justice.

Early that morning Roshan had offered up a prayer of earnest heart to *Hormuzd* to endow her with enough strength to continue on the straight path of truth and duty and had made the following *ekrar* or admission which a devout Zorastrian makes it a point to do every time he unwounds and wounds the sacred *kushti* on the

Sudreh [1] round his waist :

> "I am a Zorastrian. I am a believer in one God. I agree to follow the precepts and sing the praises of my own religion. I ardently love and glory in good thoughts, good words and good deeds. I am the true follower of the benign Zorastrian creed, which aims at the spread of peace and plenty, the laying down of deadly strifes and bloody weapons of war and which is the creator of self-respect and self-reliance and above all of purity and virtue. I conscientiously believe that the Zorastrian creed, of which I am a devout follower, is the sublimest of all that have been or existed in the past, the sublimest of those that are now existing and the sublimest of those that may exist hereafter,"

A thrill of pleasure went through the audience when the name of Roshan Ardeshir Dalal was called out. Roshan the Bright brought nothing but *roshni* (light) into the law-ridden atmosphere of the court-room and brightened the faces of friends and foes alike.

The Interpreter as usual administered the oath to her. The Avesta being given to her she held it in her hand and repeated the following words as bid by the Interpreter :

MANASHNI, GAVASHNI, KUNASHNI
(Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds.)

Roshan looked undisturbed and unmoved. All eyes were centred on her. She was composure itself. Even Mr. Khatkhate could not get his eyes off her. When asked if she wanted the services of an interpreter she firmly said, "No". The Magistrate

[1] *Sudreh*, which means righteous path, is a garment made of white muslin and reaching upto the knees. It enjoins and is a symbol of purity and virtue. *Kushti*, is a long and woven thread. a sort of a *kummerband* or waist-band made of the wool of white sheep. It is supposed to say 'gird up your loins, ye Zorastrians, fight ceaselessly for all that is good and great and strike down all that is impure and evil.' The thread is wound and unwound each time we offer up prayers to the one Holy God.

however observed that the Interpreter would be by and would help her when required.

Mr. Aga to the witness:—What is your name ?

A.—Roshan Ardeshir Dalal.

Q.—Do you know what you are here for to-day ?

A.—I do certainly know it. I am here on oath to say the truth and to help the right cause.

Q.—Can you tell us if you have understood the full intent and purport of the oath that has just been administered to you ?

A.—Yes. I have learnt what it means and I mean to follow it.

Q.—Do you know what would be the consequences if you tell an untruth here or try to shield the accused ?

A.—Yes. I know that in that case I shall either be fined or imprisoned.

Q.—Will you tell us what the charges against Jal and Thriti are ?

A.—Yes. Jal is charged with committing theft of a jewel case from my mother's cupboard on my last birthday and Thriti is charged with receiving and retaining the stolen property.

Q.—Do you not believe the charges to be true ?

At this question the face of the witness glowed and her fine eyes flashed.

A.—Certainly not. They are entirely false.

Q.—Can you prove that they are false ?

A.—I will try to do so.

Q.—Who persuaded you to come and give evidence here ?

A.—No one. I am doing it of my own free will.

Q.—Did any one instruct you what to say here ?

A.—No.

Q.—What makes you think that the charges are false ?

A.—At about nine o'clock on my birthday I was asked by my mother to leave for school, because I had not said the *patet* prayer and I obeyed.

Q.—Why did you not say your prayers ?

A.—I said other prayers, not the *patet*, which I am told is a prayer of penitence for sinners.

Q.—Were you at school the whole day ?

A.—No. I was very unwell on that day and got somewhat worse on reaching school. My teacher seeing me so, insisted on my returning home.

Q.—Would you not have done so if your teacher had not insisted on it ?

A.—I would not have dared to do so for fear of incurring the displeasure of my mother.

Q.—What form does your mother's displeasure take ? Mere angry words, I suppose ?

The witness hesitated and stood quiet.

Q.—You do not answer. So it is something more than mere angry words ; is it not ?

A.—Can you not avoid this question, Sir ? Why would you have me answer it ?

Mr. Aga :—I am very sorry but I must ask you to reply to it in the interests of the accused.

A.—Then I must tell you, Sir, that my mother's displeasure sometimes assumes a very unpleasant form.

She then hung her head and remained silent.

Q.—Then she is violent ?

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, this question is viary irrelevant. Yar Hanar should nat allow it.

The Magistrate :—You are right Mr. Khatkate but the exigencies of the case demand that I should allow it.

Mr. Khatkhate :—But, Yar Worrorshipful Hanar, I aabject viary straangly.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Khatkhate, all I can do is to note down your objection.

The witness was then asked to reply to the last question.

A.—Alas, Sir, it is not her fault. She does not know what

she is at when her temper is up.

Q.—O, then she has a temper ? Can you tell us if she is ever violent with your sister ?

A.—No. She dare not do so.

Q.—Why can she not dare ?

A.—O, Sir, you are hard again. If I knew you would put me this question I would not have said it.

Q.—I have already told you that I have to be hard with you in the interests of the accused.

A.—My mother does not treat Sherbanoo as myself for she is af raid of her.

The Magistrate :—Do you mean to say, my little maiden, that Sherbanoo would pay her mother back, I mean ill-treat her in return ?

A.—Yes, Sir, I think so.

The Magistrate :—Has it ever happened to your knowledge ?

A.—It has not actually happened but it has often threatened to be so. My mother on such occasions always gives way.

The Magistrate :—Does she not give way with you and your father ?

A.—No, Sir ; unfortunately never.

The Magistrate :—Does she not like you ?

A.—No, Sir ; I fear she does not.

Mr. Aga :— Did you go straight to your mother when you returned from school on your birthday ?

A.—I—I—Sir, dared not do it. I have just told you why.

Q.—Well then, where did you go ?

A.—I went straight to Miss Thriti's room and asked if I should go upstairs but she pressed me to stay with her.

Q.—What was Miss Thriti doing when you went to her ?

A.—She was arranging her things in her cupboard with the help of her ayah.

Q.—Was Jal at home at the time ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What did he do ?

A.—He took me into the next room and we busied ourselves looking at the family album ?

Q.—Tell us what followed ?

A.—A few minutes after there was a knock at the door. Jal got up to his feet and locked me in. When he returned I was told our Rama had come to invite him and Thriti to dine with my mother and sister but that they had declined the invitation. Sherbanoo had then, I was told, personally come down and pressed the invitation. Thriti would not go but Jal at her bidding had agreed to do so.

Q.—Did Jal go up ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What did you do when Jal was away ?

A.—I kept to the same room. The door was just enough open to enable me to peep into the front-room where Thriti was sitting. A little while after, the girl Rosy came in and informed her mother that the pot in the kitchen was boiling over. At this the ayah ran to the kitchen. A minute or two more and I saw some one approaching the front door of Thriti's room. I was seized with a sudden fright. What if I were found out? So I immediately closed the door of my room and looked through the key-hole. The female figure approached the cupboard near which Thriti was sitting. In hardly a minute she walked out as quietly as she had come in.

Q.—How do you know the figure came in and went out quietly ?

A.—Because I heard no noise of footsteps and I afterwards learnt that Thriti was entirely ignorant that any one had come in.

Q.—What happened after the figure left ?

A.—The ayah returned to Thriti's room and took her to task for keeping the front door open. The next minute she observed that it was her own fault that she had not closed it for how could Thriti know that it was open ?

Q.—How do you know it was a female figure and not a male ? You say you were seized with a sudden fright.

A.—Yes. But I had just time enough before I shut the door to see that it was a female figure.

Q.—What was she dressed like? A Mahomedan or a Feringi woman?

A.—Quite like a Parsi lady.

Q.—Could you not look at her face through the key-hole?

A.—No. I could have done so if she were a child. I could only see the lower portion of her dress through the key-hole.

Q.—What was the colour of her *sari*?

A.—It was pale blue.

Q.—Was it a plain *sari*?

A.—No. It was not a plain one. Silk *boottis* [1] with *tilis* [2] were worked on it in variegated colours.

Q.—Did you see such a *sari* for the first time then?

A.—No. I had seen such a *sari* before.

Q.—Where?

A.—My own sister has such a *sari*.

Q.—Then why could it not be your sister's *sari*?

A.—I cannot say.

Q.—When did you see your sister wearing it?

A.—O, at first it was a visiting dress *sari*. I have had heard my sister telling our mother that it was no longer fit to be used at visits or weddings and that she meant to wear it at home.

Q.—So your sister is wearing such a *sari* at home?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And yet you cannot say that it was Sherbanoo that you saw entering Thriti's room?

A.—Yes. I cannot say it because I had not the slightest idea it was she.

Q.—When did Jal return?

A.—In about two hours.

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[1] Little buds or unblossomed flowers.

[2] Round tiny bits of shining metal sheets, silver or gold.

Q.—Did you ask Jal if he were pleased with his visit to your mother and sister ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And what was his reply ?

A.—He said he wished he had not gone. He also said, to use his own words, he wished he could vomit out what he had taken in. He felt sure, he said, that they had some object in inviting him. He was angry with Thriti and the ayah for forcing him to go. He would not answer any more questions.

The Magistrate :—Do you think all that you have just told us is quite correct ?—That you have concealed or omitted nothing ? Is your memory good ?

A.—Yes, my memory is very good. I am known for it at school. They all envy me for it. I bless God for it as it has enabled me to omit nothing to-day.

The Magistrate :—What rank do you generally keep in your class ? Can you produce a certificate of good behaviour and good memory from the head of your school ?

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, I have taken care to get such a certificate and also her school-register of marks from the Principal of her school. Your Worship will see from these that she is always at the top of her form and that her conduct is exemplary.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—When did you return to your mother on that eventful day ?

A.—I went up at about 5-30 which is my usual hour of return from school.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Var you nat aashamed of cheating yar maadhar and sister ? You made them believe that you were at school all day.

The blood rushed into Roshan's face and she was about to reply when the Magistrate interposed :

" I cannot allow you, Mr. Khatkhate, to put this question now. You can do it if you like when crossing the witness."

Q.—Do you know Mr. Erach Aspendiar Aga ?

A.—Yes. He is my cousin.

Q.—What do you think of him ?

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship, I aabject viary straangly to this question.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga will modify the question.

Q.—Do you like Mr. Erach ?

A.—No. I don't. He has never done anything that could please my father or myself. He has done nothing to help the charges against the accused. O ! yes, that he has.

Q.—How do you know that ?

A.—I once overheard them talking about it when they did not know I had returned from school.

Q.—And when was that ?

A.—The day after my birthday. They were all in my mother's room, where the cupboard of valuables stands. Rama was not there to inform them of my return. He was scolded for not doing so.

Q.—Scolded by whom ?

A.—By my mother, sister and Mr. Erach.

Q.—What did you do on your return from school ?

A.—I was going to take the cold cup of tea which stood for me on the dining-table unseen by them.

Q.—Did you not ask Rama to put it over the stove and warm it for you ?

A.—No. For he would not have done it. Servants have orders not to do it for me.

Q.—What did you overhear ? Were you near enough to overhear it ?

A.—Yes. I was at the end of the table near my mother's private room. I overheard Mr. Erach saying, 'Hurrah, they are now in our clutches.' My sister replied, 'Yes, we will now make these proud ones go down on their knees.'

Q.—Did your mother say nothing ?

A.—She said, 'we should not be sure until we get them punished.'

Q.—How can you tell to whom they were referring ?

A.—They were referring to Thriti and Jal and the charges laid against them. Mr. Erach said soon after, "*Fuiji*, before I help you I must extract a promise from you both." "What promise ? " my mother and sister asked. Mr. Erach replied, " I ask you, cousin Shera, to promise me that you will marry me and you *Fuiji* that you will not hinder Shera from doing so, after we have won the case ; I cannot marry that girl Thriti, nor would I like to call that boy Jal my brother-in-law, after they are convicted." (A murmur of rage and hate pervaded the court.)

Mr. Aga :—Can you tell us what reply your mother and sister gave ?

A.—Yes. My mother said she could not agree to this. My sister said she saw no objection to it. I did not wait to hear more for fear of being found out. Luckily I had not drunk the tea and I put the cup where it was before and went to the cook-room. I told Rama I had just returned from school and asked him to inform them about it. He did so. They then came out. Mr. Erach then caught me by the neck and asked me what business I had to return from school so soon. I told him it was the usual hour and begged of him to release me as I was suffocating. 'Serve you right,' my sister said. 'You little devil,' roared my mother, 'you must have overheard us ; that man must have put you up to do it.' Had not my father come home just in the nick of time I shudder to think what would have happened. See, Sir, there must be marks of that man's fingers on my throat yet, however faint.

Tears here rose into her eyes and slid fast down her cheeks. A feeling of rage ran through the crowd, so much so that some of them even rose to their feet. The Magistrate then asked the Interpreter to conduct Miss Roshan up to him. He examined her neck and throat and could not help noticing faint traces of the outrage.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, did not her father take her to a Doctor ?

Mr. Aga :—That he did, Sir. I have here a certificate of Dr. J. Jeejeebhoy, M.B., B.S.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorship will have no aabjection to let me see the sartificate ?

The Magistrate :—Certainly.

Mr. Khatkhate having seen it the Magistrate admitted it as evidence. The certificate said that on a particular day (which tallied with the date given by the witness Roshan) at about 6-15 of the evening Mr. Ardeshir Edulji Dalal and his daughter Roshan paid him a visit at his consulting rooms at Grant Road. Mr. Ardeshir asked him to examine his daughter's neck and throat which was covered by her silk handkerchief and to give his opinion. He did so and found fresh nail-marks and finger-impressions on them. He could say that a heavy hand, that of a male, must have clutched her by the throat and neck strongly within the last hour or so.

Q.—Well, Miss Roshan, will you tell us what followed ?

A.—When Mr. Erach saw my father approaching he immediately released me. My father was wild with rage. He would have thrashed Mr. Erach but I rushed into his arms and prevented him from doing so. My mother and sister being afraid of the consequences dragged Mr. Erach out of the room.

Q.—Well, what next ?

A.—My father took me to Dr. J. Jeejeebhoy.

Q.—Is that all you have to say ?

A.—Only a few words more. I was sorry for having told a lie to my mother and sister that I had only that moment returned from school. But for the attack—.

Q.—What attack ?

A.—The attack made on me by that man. (There was a bitterness in the girl's tone and a look on her face which were more than justified by circumstances.)

Q.—You were going to say that but for the attack—.

A.—Yes, I was going to say that but for the attack I would have made a clean breast of it before them.

A solemn silence took possession of all in the room. The sympathy of all centered on Roshan.

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, I have no more questions to put to this young lady.

The invincible Mr. Khatkhate then arose. He looked at Miss Roshan furiously as if to say, it is my turn now, you can't escape me. He adjusted his *dupatta* properly over his head and gracefully arranged the *ooperna* over his shoulders. He then passed his right hand over his upper lip, just to give his moustaches an extra twirl or two. But to his great chagrin he found they were missing. His hand then travelled to his eyebrows ; he would smooth them and soothe his ire-irritated brains. But they too were not there. To make up for this he screwed his nose with his fingers and out came a loud sneeze, which moved the court into a loud laugh.

Miss Roshan put her folded handkerchief to her mouth and smothered an outburst. Even the Magistrate was pleased with this little relaxation and said, " Mr. Khatkhate, if you were standing in one of those Mahomedan *adalats* you would have had to pay for that sneeze with your nose." (Vociferous laugh.)

Mr. Khatkhate laughed too and said, " thiat was in the old old days.'

Mr. Khatkhate then approached the window, threw out the chewed heap of *pan* and *supari* in his mouth, returned with his lips all red, cleared his throat with a loud snort by way of warning and then opened his fire.

Q.—Well, Miss Roshan, do you still aattend the school ?

A.—No.

Q.—Why nat ?

A.—My mother would not allow me to do it any longer.

Q.—Why nat ?

A.—She thinks schools are not for girls in *saris.*

Q.—Is thiat al ? Yar maadher had no other reasons ? Did she nat withdra you fram school far biad behavio ur ?

A.—I never behaved badly.

Q.—Vas nat yar maadher aafraid of yar meeting the second aacused on yar way to and back fram school and caatching his biad ways ?

A.—She would have told me that if she were really so afraid. Jal never met me in that way. He is too good for that.

Q.—Who is Jal ?

A.—He who is so falsely accused.

Q.—Why do you say ' faalsely '? You are only an inexperienced girrul.

The Magistrate :—An inexperienced young ' lady ', you want to say, Mr. Khatkhate ?

Mr. Khatkhate :—If thiat be better, yes, Sir.

Q.—You have said thiat yar maadher does nat like you. Have you ever tried to please her ?

A.—Yes ; always.

Q.—Then why does she nat like you ?

A.—She would like me if I give up my father, not do as he may advise me and take sides with her when she and Sherbanoo are insulting him.

Q.—But is it not their business ? You are but a child. Why should you interfere ?

A.—What would you have done if your mother treated your father so ? (Loud laugh.)

Mr. Khatkhate thinking discretion the better part of valour shifted to other matters.

Q.—You have said yar maadher is violent at times. Will you give some instances ?

A.—Yes. Once I was in my study-room and Jal came to see

me. Seeing the door closed he called out to me to open it. This enraged my mother who came into the room and treated me roughly. On another occasion the same treatment was meted out to me when I asked permission to accompany Sherbanoo to a wedding party.

Q.—But you must nat have been invited ?

A.—I was.

Q.—Had you a separate invitation-carrud ?

A.—No. It was the old-fashioned invitation card to mother requesting her to attend with her family.

The Magistrate :—You will excuse me, Mr. Khatkhate, but as your client treats her husband like a baby she must have allowed him to accompany Sherbanoo to the wedding. (Laugh.)

Mr. Khatkhate smiled by way of answer.

Mr. Khakhate :—Rough treatment and violence are viary vague terms. Please explain them mar clearly.

The Magistrate :—Which can only mean, Mr. Khatkhate, that she should expose your client more emphatically. You must know violence and rough treatment mean, beating with hand or cane, abusing, etc., in one word, assaulting.

Mr. Khatkhate bowed low.

Q.—If yar father and maadher live separate will you nat consider it yar duty to live with yar maadher ?

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, this question is entirely irrelevant ; besides the court already knows that Miss Roshan sides with her father.

Q.—When the ayah of the second accused was in the cook-room on the 3rd day of the current month you say a female figure entered the room in which the second accused was. Why did you nat come immediately out of yar hiding and make siar who it vas ? Would it nat have relieved yar doubts ?

A.—It did not occur to me to do so.

Q.—Do nat other Parsi ladies wear *sari* similar to thiat

worn by thiat female figure ? Have you nat seen others doing it ?

A.—I may have ; but I do not remember where and when I have seen them.

Q.—Did you see Mr. Erach overturning the Taady-glass on the day of the Taady-party at Mr. Mehelooji's quite by accident ?

A.—Yes. I saw it but it was not an accident. It was done intentionally.

Q.—Did nat the second aacused make you al believe on the Taady-party day that she was mar hurt and mar ill thian she really vas ?

A.—No. If anything she showed as if she was less hurt and less ill.

Q.—When Bai Jerbanoo came to Mr. Mehelooji's did she say why she had come there ?

A.—She said, she had received a telephone message from Mr. Mehelooji's to be there immediately.

Q.—Did she say who sent the message ?

A.—All she said was that our ayah brought her the message and from the voice the ayah guessed it was from Mr. Erach.

Q.—Var you at Bai Jerbanoo's first day's *patherna ?*

A.—Yes, I was.

Q.—Where var you sitting ?

A.—I was sitting close to my mother and sister and very near Miss Thriti.

Q.—And you doubtless heard Thritibai, Mrs. Mehelooji and Mrs. Bahadurshah abusing yar maadher and sister ?

A.—Neither Mrs. Mehelooji nor Mrs. Bahadurshah attended the first day's *patherna.* There were no abuses from anyone. Bai Jerbanoo hated all quarrels and bickerings on such occasions.

Q.—How do you know thiat ?

A.—I had heard her telling Thriti about it so often.

Q.—Vat do you think about the relations of yar fiamily with the fiamily of the aacused ?

A.—Very friendly on my father's side ; very unfriendly on the side of my mother and sister.

Q.—Is thiat yar opinion, or has any one put it into yar head ?

A.—It is my own opinion.

Q.—With whom have you been living after the first hearing of this case by His Worrorship ?

A.—I have been living with my father.

Q.—Where ? He must be living with some one else ?

A.—I am not going to tell it to you.

Q.—But you must.

Mr. Aga :—You cannot force her to do so.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga is right. I cannot allow the question.

Q.—Are you nat aashamed of working against yar maadher and sister ?

A.—There can be no shame in telling the truth ; you know I have been sworn in this court to do it. (Low cheers from the crowd.)

Q.—Where vas the second aacused sitting when the tree fell down at the Taady-party ? Vas she nat sitting near Mr. Jamshed Aga ?

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, I can only allow this question if you have no objection to it.

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, I have no objection to it. I will reply to the questien myself if you will allow it.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, you can write your reply and give it to me.

Mr. Aga complied.

Miss Roshan was then asked to answer the pleader's question.

A.—Miss Thriti was not sitting by Mr. Jamshed Aga. She was sitting between my father and Miss Macgregor.

The Magistrate to the witness :—And where was Mr. Erach sitting ?

A.—He was sitting between my mother and my sister.

The Magistrate :—How long ?

A.—All the while until the tree came down.

The Magistrate here read Mr. Aga's written reply :—" All through the Toddy-party and until the tree came down Miss Thriti Patel was seated opposite to Bai Meherbanoo and Bai Sherbanoo and Mr. Erach. Mr. Ardeshir Dalal and Miss Macgregor were seated on either side of Miss Patel. I was sitting next to Mr. Mehelooji in the same row."

Mr. Khatkhate :—How could Mr. Mehelooji have invited yar maadher and sister to the party if he knew thiat they var unfriendly to the aacused, unless he vaanted to sow mar seeds of discard ?

A.—He may have thought the Toddy-party would bring them together and make them friends.

Mr. Khatkhate scratched his forehead for more questions but none seemed to occur to him. He therefore said that the witness could retire.

Next to be called in was Mr. Ardeshir Dalal. So there he was a finely-built, nice-looking, simple-behaved and simply-clad man. There was nothing uncouth or uncourteous about him. To look at him was to be pleased and to be put at your ease. Old and young, child and infant, alike trusted him. Babes struggled for a transfer to his arms from those of their mothers. His figure, face and features were well-moulded. It did not require a long or a second look at him to scan his nature or to read his character for they were written as it were in gold letters on his face. They were *Manashni*, *Ghavashni*, *Kunashni*.

A word about his profession. His wife and his eldest daughter and Erach threw it often in his teeth. They pricked him on it. They urged that all share-brokers were alike and that he Ardeshir was not an exception. Good as he was, Ardeshir did not retort for he knew that those who knew him well knew him to be otherwise. When too far irritated he simply told them that he treated their taunts with the contempt they deserved. Even the worst of pro-

fessions, he said, could be turned into the best.

As is the world so is the law court. It has its saints and satans. It has good and truthful men and evil-disposed and bad men to administer the verdict of the law to the good and the bad alike. How often are the good there the victims of the bad on earth? How often is it that the law wittingly or unwittingly supports the latter and sacrifices the former, because it happens to be law? How often is it that the ends of justice are perverted and misdirected? How often is it that good and honest folks, perfectly innocent, are made to drag on a miserable existence till the end of existence until a certain law long known to be faulty is amended?

Look at the law of matrimony. Its defects are the same here as in England. Here as there these defects which are unmistakable and ignominious are under consideration for years for modifications and amendment. How often is it that such modifications are mercilessly prolonged, simply because those who should come to support remain to slay?

The Parsons in long robes and in short have raised a hue and cry against any modification in the British Marriage Act. May be, they are wrong—may be they are right for there are many who think that the law of matrimony as it now stands is for the largest good of the largest number and must be worked so, even at the sacrifice of a few. Weaken the fibres and the fabric will collapse—they say. We certainly do not want our women to marry A, B, C or X, Y, Z to give them up and to re-marry them in turn and out, like the Yankee or the French women. The fact remains, however, that our Marriage Act is faulty. We do not want to unscrew the hinges but to recast and refix them with better screws.

The Parsi Matrimonial Act which is based on the lines of that in England has defects in common with the latter. Men and women, young and hopeful, but victims of parental mandate or unlucky choice, are afraid to go to court to disunite and unite again

in happier wedlock, for the law is so harsh and hard, so hard and fast ! It would rather kill than save. How often is it that under the guise of Judicial Separation, as high-sounding as senseless, good and honest lives have heen blighted and blasted ?

Are we Parsis unaware of the defects in our Marriage Laws ? Are they not apparent and appalling ? Have they not sent strings of people straight to the grave? Have they not doomed youthful lives to living deaths ? Our good men and great men, our rich men and ripe men, our big men and bold men, our round men and square men, our rising and risen men, our men of law and men of erudition, our elite and elate, know it and feel it. They have known it and felt it and will go on knowing and feeling the same, may be to the cost of strangers, may be to the sacrifice of their own kith and kin ; and yet they will not raise so much as their last finger to save this most graceless and life-killing situation.

There was poor Ardeshir ; there was Meherbanoo—the victims of an unhappy union. How often did they wish that that union could be dissolved ?—Dissolved without actual disgrace, dissolved without proof of actual misbehaviour—adultery which is the only ground in the eye of the law for a tangible disunion of the sexes and which is in some cases trumped-up to break through the bonds of eternal bondage ? The man and even sometimes the woman, innocent though they be, intentionally take the burden of this sin on themselves, because the law does not allow a simpler or sinless course. Jamshed and Thriti, Erach and Sherbanoo, were standing as it were on the edge of the dangerous precipice of this dire doom. Luckily for them, their parents had only bethrothed them ! They had initiated but not completed the iniquity. It was perhaps good for Jamshed and Thriti that Meherbanoo and Shera, in conformity with Erach had worked up that sin of sorrow and pain, that shameful attack against the innocents ; for did it not help to snap the bonds and

snatch them from eternal bondage ?

But to proceed with the examination of Mr. Ardeshir.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—Your name ?

A.—Ardeshir Edulji Dalal,

Q.—Your vocation ?

A.—Share and stock-broker.

Q.—Do you remember the 3rd day of the current month ?

A.—Yes ; very vividly, — so vividly that I shall never forget it.

Q.—Why do you say so ?

A.—Because I take it to be a black-letter day in the history of my family.

Q.—What makes you say that ?

A.—Because it was the day marked by a black deed.

Q.—What is that black deed to which you refer ?

A.—The black deed was the effort to blacken the good name and fame of two innocents, I mean those who unfortunately stand as the accused in this court to-day.

Q.—Please be more direct. What is the effort to which you refer and by whom was it made ?

A.—The effort is the false charge of theft against Jal and the false charge of aiding and abetting against Thriti made by my wife Meherbanoo and my daughter Sherbanoo with the help of their relation and friend Erach Aspendiar Aga.

Q.—Why do you call them false charges ?

A.—Because I know them to be so and hope to be able to aid you in proving them to be so.

Q.—What are your grounds for saying so? Were you an unwilling party to it and subsequently withdrew for fear of going to purgatory ? (Laughter.)

A.—God forbid, I was never a party to it but I was an unwilling and unseen witness and heard all that was being hatched on a particular day to compromise these two innocents.

Q.—Will you narrate as briefly and as accurately as possible all that you heard about the hatching of the plot ?

The witness here narrated clearly and lucidly all that he had heard at Meher Villa on that eventful day, when he was a self-made prisoner in the bathroom of his own house.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—Did you ever talk to anybody of this incident before these proceedings were instituted ?

A.—Yes, that I did.

Q.—To whom did you speak about it ?

A.—I spoke about it to Miss Macgregor, Thriti and Jal, when Mr. Rustom Delaver was also present.

Q.—When was that ?

A.—It was on the 5th of July last.

Q.—What made you tell them about it that day ?

A.—It was a letter addressed to Miss Macgregor by the second complainant.

Q.—What was that letter ?

A.—A letter from my daughter Sherbanoo to Miss Macgregor asking her if she would undertake to give tuition to my second daughter Roshan. I am told that this letter has already been entered as evidence in this case.

The Magistrate :—I must ask the witness how that letter could have led him to reveal the occurrence which he has narrated to the court.

A.—Your Worship, the letter made me to think that the complainants had two aims in writing it, namely, to win over Miss Macgregor on their side and if she did not change sides to give her a bad name and dismiss her.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—What reason have you to suppose that the present charge is the outcome of the particular deliberation and discussion between your wife and daughter on that particular day ?

A.—I take it to be the direct outcome of that deliberation and discussion because subsequent events go to confirm it.

Q.—What object could Mr. Erach have in going against the accused though he is their cousin and engaged to one of them ?

A.—Though Erach has been betrothed to Thriti he hates her and dislikes her. He would have broken the match off long ago were it not for what I have just narrated to you.

Q.—Is there anyone else whom Mr. Erach likes better than Thriti ? Has Thriti a rival ?

A.—Yes. He prefers my daughter Sherbanoo to Thriti and would move heaven and earth to marry her.

Q.—Do you like and love Roshan more than Sherbanoo ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you not like and love Sherbanoo ? She is also your daughter ?

A.—No, because she does not allow me to like and love her. (Laughter.)

Q.—Does your wife love you ?

A.—No. She never loved me.

Q.—Why so ?

A.—For more reasons than one. She thinks I should not like or help her sister's children. She thinks that I am not rich enough for her. She thinks she will be able to make a better match if she become a widow. (Laughter.)

The Magistrate :—Why don't you oblige her in that matter ?

A.—I would do so if Your Worship would only help me or show me how to do it. (Roars of laughter.)

Mr. Aga to the witness :—Do you contribute to the household expenses ?

A.—Yes ; I contribute Rs. 150 per month.

Q.—Your wife has said here that you contribute rupees one hundred only ?

A.—Then she has told you an untruth.

Q.—Why did you send Roshan to school on her birthday ?

A.—It was not I that did it. It was her mother.

Q.—Why did your wife do it ?

A.—Perhaps because she wished to be cruel and perhaps because she wanted her to be out of the way.

Q.—Be more explicit.

A.—My wife must have thought that if Roshan stayed at home she would not be able to carry out her plans against Jal and Thriti. Besides it would give her one more opportunity of being cruel to Roshan and thus indirectly taking revenge on me.

Q.—Is that the kind of cruelty she has always exercised over Roshan ?

A.—No. She and the second complainant used to cane and beat her.

Q.—Did the complainants beat her after they laid the accusation against Thriti and Jal ?

A.—No. Since that man Erach's beastly behaviour towards her I and Roshan have not been near them.

Q.—What do you mean by not having been near them ?

A.—We have been living apart.

Q.—What was that beastly behaviour of Mr. Erach to which you refer ?

A.—On the 4th day of the current month when I returned home in the evening I found my daughter Roshan in Erach's clutches. He was holding her by the neck and almost suffocating her. At sight of me he let her go. But for Roshan who held my hands and but for the fear of taking the law in my own hands I should have given him a sound drubbing. (There were murmurs of ' Pity you did not do it.') I took her to Dr. J. Jeejeebhoy and showed him the nail and finger marks on her neck. The Doctor certified that they must be the result of an assault committed by a strong hand, likely that of a male.

Mr. Aga to the Magistrate :—Your Worship, it is the same certificate that you have entered as evidence in Miss Roshan's examination.

The witness completed the answer by saying, to prevent a repetition of such cowardly attacks he and Roshan were now living apart.

Mr. Khatkhate :—But, Yar Worrorship, the witness has enticed away thiat little girrul Roshan fram her maadher's control.

The Magistrate :—Miss Roshan has as much right to be with her father as with her mother. It is open to the mother to bring a separate charge against the father for it. Why don't you advise her to do it ? (Loud laugh.)

Mr. Aga here declared that Mr. Ardeshir's examination was over.

Mr. Khatkhate said he had only a few questions to put to the witness.

Q.—You have said, Mr. Ardeshir, thiat Mr. Erach hates Thritibai and thiat he would like to marry yar dater Sherbanoo. You must be an expert in reading other people's minds ?

A.—It requires no mental effort to know it. The very fact of Erach appearing as a witness against the accused and for the complainants proves it.

Q.—But vat if he is doing it in the caz of truth and justice, just on the same grounds on which you aalege to have aaspoused the caz of the aacused ?

A.—But I have not hatched any plot nor harassed the complainants. They have harassed me.

Q.—Has nat the second aacused preferred someone ialse to Mr. Erach ? Would she nat have married thiat someone ialse laang ago if she could have done it with her maadher's consent ?

A.—If I were a girl and unmarried I would certainly give up at any risk a bad fiancé in favour of a good one.

Q.—You are nat a coward, witness ; the viary fiact of yar aapearing against yar wife and daater shows thiat you are nat ?

A.—I am not a coward ; I know when to assert myself.

Q.—Well then, when you var in the bathroom and heard yar wife and daater hiatching a plaat as you say, vas it nat yar duty to

boldly caanfront them and to save them fram the consequences ?

A.—I did not then quite know the nature of the plot, nor precisely against whom it was being hatched.

Q.—When you heard vat the aacused var charged with why did you nat stap yar wife and daater fram taking iaction against them ? Could you nat have thereby iacted in the best interests of both the parties ?

A.—If you knew my wife and daughter as I do or if you were in my place you would not have tried the game yourself. (Laughter.)

Q.—Thiat is nat a reply. You must tell me why you did nat do it.

A.—I did not do it because it would not have improved matters. Besides the charge was laid at the police-station and the matter was in the hands of the police.

The witness was here told that he was wanted no more and he withdrew.

Mr. Aga was about to call the other witnesses on behalf of the accused, when the Magistrate observed that so far as he was concerned the evidence already adduced was more than sufficient to enable him to come to a decision. He would of course hear further evidence if Mr. Aga insisted on it but he thought it would be much like beating a dead dog and more like firing volleys into a carcase.

Mr. Aga :—I quite agree with Your Worship but I think we should know what my learned friend there has to say about it.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Hanar, I have nothing to urge against the prapojal.

The Magistrate then asked Mr. Aga and Mr. Khatkhate if they proposed to address the court before he gave his decision. They having both replied in the affirmative the Magistrate said he would hear them the next day.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE BAHADURSHAHS AGAIN

"This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet."

SHAKESPEARE

BAHADUR Mahal was indeed a brave little place. It had grown old with age and yet defying its ravages reared its head firmly over the rocky elevation on which it stood. Behman, the present owner, had handsome offers for it but he flatly declined to sell it for the property was dear to him as life. The family was an old one. It had gone through various freaks of fortune and vicissitudes, yet had survived and sustained its glory. Behman had the credit of saving the situation at a time when absolute ruin stared the family in the face. It was the time of the share mania, which ruined so many and raised but a few. The house was not very big but its situation was charming. It was unpretentious and yet pretentious. It was commodious and comfortable and was the pride of its proprietors. Behman took care to preserve its old exterior without endangering its stability. With an oldish look and with the weight of years on its shoulders, the house was quite bright and young within. It was tastefully decorated and its adornments and conveniences were well selected and well arranged. Order seemed to be the pass-word in everything.

It was a Sunday, the Sunday preceding the day on which the Magistrate was to give his decision in the much-talked-of and minutely discussed case of blood *versus* blood. The shades of evening were falling fast. The sun, the glorious regent of the skies, was preparing to hide its glory beyond the western horizon and was

giving place to the nightly shadows which were gently stealing across the ethereal firmament. Birds and beasts and flowers, in the words of the hymn, were preparing to be asleep. Rapt in deep meditation, Behman Bahadurshah stood on the rear verandah of his house, which faced the sea, leaning his tall person against the balustrade and resting his glorious head on his right hand. He was as much a matter for study as the impending changes in nature which he was looking at so admiringly.

"I wish," he murmured, "I could stroll out with Rodolph and with my sheltering materials. It is an evening for strolling out across the hills and losing oneself in the environments of the Hanging Gardens.[1] But, no. I shall wait for Shirin. She is already late. What could be the matter with the child? I would lose everything in the world than lose her. There, there, am not I doing injustice to her who has carried me through thick and thin so strenuously? Life would be hardly worth living for her and for me without Shirin. She is fast growing. We must get her married some day. And then, what then? Well, I suppose, she must then leave us. It would be quite in the order of things. I'll then have to console myself with my wife, this old edifice with its old and dear associations and that four-footed Rodolph which are all so very dear to me."

Just then a delicate hand was laid on his shoulder. He started and looked back.

"Bahadur, why do you start? Have I disturbed you?" His wife frequently called him by his family name of Bahadur in preference to Behman. She said it befitted him more for was he not *bahadur*, brave, every inch of him? Her husband was even as kind as the Yezd Behman who watches over and protects the animal creation all over the world. Both the names started with a B and both sat so well on him, thought the wife.

[1] A beautiful garden laid out on the slopy heights of Malabar Hill. It has now been decided to call it the Sir Pherozsha Mehta Garden in honour of that renowned Municipal Councillor and politician.

"No, dearie, you have not disturbed me. I was thinking, as I have always been, of the three—my wife, my daughter and my darling. The darling, you know, is this darling house of mine. Though inanimate, it breathes of life and all that is lovely in the lifeless. It has fought with me and with you the fights of fickle fortune, which has at last condescended to favour us. I was also thinking of this faithful friend of mine who has grown old in my service."

He placed his hand kindly and unconsciously on his big four-footed who had crept up to him and laid himself down fondly at his feet, as if quite understanding what the bipeds were talking about.

"I sometimes think, Dina, that this quadruped is wiser than many of our Parsis of the day. He reads our minds but the Parsis do not read theirs. He knows our wants and wishes ; the Parsis do not know theirs. Dost thou remember what the Persian poet hath said :—

> "The son of Kohan[1] associated with bad men and the family virtue of prophecy was for ever lost to him. The dog of mountainous men adopted the company of wise men and became a wise mortal."

Our communal bark is now in the hands of a few who drift it here and drift it there and threaten to sink it in the turbid waters of ignorance, fanaticism and fatalism. Those who can steer it safely across are so engrossed in their own aggrandizement that they would rather see a general drowning than dive deep to save it. The demand for suitable house accommodation for Parsis is far in excess of the actual supply. Remember, Dina, if the Parsis don't look sharp, God forbid, but the day is not far off when the middle and poor classes will be ejected by greedy landlords into the

[1] The richest man in ancient Persian history. It is said that the family of Kohan had the gift of prophecy, which was lost after the death of Kohan in consequence of his son having taken to bad ways.

streets like so many vagrants. But to the point, Dina. I was also thinking, what a glorious evening it is."

His wife looked dubious at the last words.

" You call it a glorious evening, Bahadur ? To my mind it is the reverse. God alone knows how it will all end to-morrow. I fear me the weather betokens evil. I have never liked such weather."

" And yet, you have not always been in the right. I take it as only the storm before the sunshine, the precursor of the sun that is to shine over the fortunes of Jal and Thriti to-morrow, of the glorious sunshine which it will reveal over them."

At this moment the sky was overcast. The sun, after a vain but valiant struggle to peep through the fleeting clouds, disappeared in despair. The wind struck up a most weird music and the yonder sea enraptured by its supernatural melody danced a most weird dance to its accompaniment. The wind screeched and the waves overlapped each other in a fantastic manner ; the wind howled and the waves went up and down, high and low, till they broke forth their hoary heads in majestic sprays on the rugged shore. The rain came down helter-skelter and threatened to deluge the earth. The performance was most bewitching, and pleased the gods in the heavens who encored it by incessant peals of thunder and flashes of lightning. Nature seemed to be bent upon a spree ; but its conviviality was of a short duration. After a short time the wind stopped its music, the waves their dancing and the gods their encores. The rain alone continued to pour for a while longer, but it soon made its exit in desperation of loneliness. There remained not a vestige of Nature's feast, except broken trees and muddy puddles. The sky cleared up, and the stars twinkled merrily, released from their recent bondage.

Mrs. Bahadurshah breathed a sigh of relief at the change in the weather. Her face cleared up and she looked at her husband demurely as if conscious of her own defeat.

" Well, what sayest thou now, Dina ? Do you still feel doubt-

ful of the result? See how it has cleared up. But where is the child? It is so late. What could have detained her?"

In ran at that moment, the child, who was in fact little short of a woman now. Two pair of hands were at once parted and stretched out to receive her. The child did not know into which pair to run first. Then as if led by nature it was those of the female parent into which she first ran. The male parent, as if approving of the action, fell back a step or two, only to lock her in his embrace the next minute.

"Where hast thou been, child, so long? We were getting so nervous about you. I feel almost like a woman where you are concerned."

"Papaji, I was about to leave Thriti's, when it commenced to rain. They would not trust me to it. There were Thriti, Jal, the ayah, Miss Macgregor, and—and Rusi, I mean Rustomji."

The child almost lisped the word Rustomji, perhaps because she felt she was wrong in calling him Rusi and perhaps because she thought her father would not approve of her doing so for Rusi was no relative of theirs. Her mother had also told her that she did not like familiarity between growing persons.

"Oh! He was there also!" said the father half-questioningly, half-musingly.

"Yes, Papaji, Mr. Rustom was also there. He is such fun when he likes. He amused us immensely."

"That he did; did he? I wish he would do better for his own sake. Amusing others is not the only duty of a young man. It is not a necessity. We don't live for it."

"Papaji, don't you think him, I mean Mr. Rustom, to be a good man?"

"That depends, my dear, on one's idea of goodness. The man whom a child of your age may think to be good is not infrequently considered to be the contrary of it by persons of age and experience."

"O, Papaji, your experience is so great. Do you think Rustom is not good? Do you think he is bad?"

"What does it matter to you, child, if he be good or bad? What have you got to do with him?" interposed the mother.

The girl's face clouded a bit. She seemed to be sorry for the difficulty her mother had raised. She looked appealingly at her father, who drew her to him, stroked her head lovingly and came to her rescue as usual.

"You ask me, darling, what I think of Rustom. I think you are not wrong in doing it. Well then, let me tell you, I do not think he is what a young man ought to be. He has splendid chances if he would only avail himself of them. He is playing with life, aye, frittering it away. Friend Mehelooji would have adopted him long ago as his son and heir but for his follies."

"But, Papaji, you don't think him to be absolutely bad? Is he so bad after all? Cannot you, cannot Mehelooji, improve him?"

"We have tried to do so, girl, but failed. The tender offices of a woman, say a mother alone could do it. But he had the misfortune to be an orphan very early in life. He must be now twenty-five though he looks as if he were older. Evidently the kind of life he leads does not suit him."

"Does he then lead a bad life, Papa? You have not told me if he is absolutely bad."

"There, there, child, you will not be little Silla, if you were not occasionally silly. If you must know it, well, I will say those who were good at Rustom's age and are now double his age must and will think Rustom to be bad. I must tell you, child, that I have no reason to suppose he is absolutely bad. There are circumstances both extenuating and relieving. Likely enough, the softening influence of a partner in life will save him some day. Mehelooji would like him to marry and settle down in life. But he will not do it. The greater fool he. I have seen that softening influence working wonders. There, now, that's enough. Let us

turn to other things."

There was a pause of two or three minutes, which passed in silence, and during which the father, mother and daughter seemed to be lost in their own thoughts. The parents wondered why the child felt so deeply about Rustom. It was not the first time she had done so. The daughter's face, if anything, had become even more cloudy at her father's concluding words. Her sorrow seemed to have deepened. Her eyes moistened and she almost wished she had not abstracted his opinion of Rustom from her father.

"Well, child, how is Thriti? Is she not joyous? Is she not hopeful? How does Jal look at the oncoming decision?"

"Oh, Papa!" cried the girl, "Thriti was very down-hearted, But that blind doctor of hers, Mr. B—, knows how to manage her. He came in just when she was very despondent and lifted her up out of the abyss of her despair, just as you used to lift me up in your arms and kiss me."

"Don't you like Mr. B—?" asked the mother. "He is a great favourite of your friend Roshan."

"O yes, *Maiji*, I do like him; if not more, as much as Roshan does. He has so much to say and solves our difficulties just as *Bavaji* does. He sang to us 'The Troubadour' and 'Just before the attle Mother,' to-day. Thriti accompanied him on the piano, Jal played violin and we joined in the chorus. Even the deaf man clapped his hands."

"The deaf man? Who was he?" asked the mother. "The deaf do not hear. How could he then clap his hands?"

"Easy enough!" said the father. "Particularly if he happen to be the one I know. Was he not Khurshed Nariman?"

"Yes, Father dear, it was he."

"That's it. That young man is a jewel; steady, obedient, intelligent and hard-working. He had the making of a great man in him but the loss of hearing has spoiled it all. His father is a man of means and keeps up a big office. Khurshed is his only son.

There was ample excuse for him to have stayed by his side. But he went on the war and fought for his King. He made a name, but lost a gift—the great gift of hearing."

"But it's not so bad as blindness, Papa?" asked the wise daughter of the wiser father. "Mr. Rustom thinks it is worse than blindness. He told Thriti he would rather go blind than go deaf. He used a big word,—let me see, I will try to remember it ; yes, there it is—he said the auscultatory sense is more valuable."

The parents exchanged glances. The daughter seemed to be once again taking on favourably to Rustom. The young man, they thought, had made an impression on her. But the subject was so deeply interesting that the father did not like to break the thread of it.

"Well ! And did Mr. Rustom give his reasons for so thinking ?" enquired he.

The girl had waited only for this little encouragement to proceed.

"To be sure, that he did ; and so cleverly too, Papa. His face shone, he stood erect and he seemed like a *Dastur* singing the *Gathas*[1]. He was quite in his element. He began by asking us, which handicaps the more ?—deafness or blindness ? Then without waiting for our reply he went on, 'I say deafness ; though the contrary view is the more general. The mind is comparatively much more sensitive to auditory stimuli than to visual stimuli. In other words what we hear makes more impression upon us than what we see. There are innumerable kinds of pleasant and unpleasant sights and sounds so that it would be impracticable for any one person to enumerate them all, but here are examples to illustrate what I mean.

"'We can read about a person being in pain or watch a person being hurt and be sorry or feel genuinely sympathetic. Or

[1] A series of prayers which were composed by Zoraster himself. They are highly inspirating and inspiring.

we can even see a person drowning and want to help or do something of assistance, but it isn't until we hear the groan of an injured person or the cry for help that we are stirred to the depths of our being to aid instantly.

" ' It seems as though we had to be aroused to action through our ears rather than through our eyes. And perhaps the most potent influence is the human voice. This is well illustrated in child-training when we see how stubbornly a child will resist a cross or impatient command while the kindly or patient request brings willing compliance. The same thing works out in the shop where men jump to help the cheerful call for aid but are morose and sullen if the boss grouses. And how we all hate to be bawled at by our superiors ? We will do anything rather than get called to account for poor work, and on the other hand we want our good work appreciated. It helps tremendously to have the word of commendation occasionally, and kindly criticism in private is also well taken.

" ' A fire in a tall office building or warehouse is a thrilling sight from a distance, but as we approach and hear the clanging of the fire engines' bells, the shouts of the firemen, the swish of the streams of water and the calls or screams for assistance, we realise that it is a dreadful thing after all.

" ' I have seen men hurt in lots of football games and often see them carried senseless from the field, and have not been much impressed ; but I will never forget a certain game in which a player had his left leg broken. The snapping of the bone could be heard all over the stadium, and was very startling ; but the suddenness of the break caused the tackled man to cry out like a hurt rabbit and that cry sickened the whole crowd of spectators and players. It was some time before the players regained sufficient nerve to go on with the game.

" ' The war-cry of the American Indians was intended to inspire terror in the hearts of those who heard it ; and it had that effect.

The war dances of the Indians and the wild dances of the negroes in Africa as well as similar religious ceremonial dances in other parts of the world begin with low humming and the light beating of tom-toms and gradually increase in intensity until the participants have worked themselves up into a frenzy.

" ' Besides savage breasts there are savage beasts that can be tamed by suitable music. The animal trainers depend much more upon the hearing than upon the vision of their animals. The simplest and most obvious illustration of this is the equestrians whose horses shift from two steps to waltz as the circus band changes its time or air. Dogs know at once from the inflection of a stranger's voice whether he is kindly disposed or not.

" ' However, there are a great many pleasant sounds as well as unpleasant ones. Therapeutically it has been often proved that music has very beneficial effects, especially during convalescence. Soothing melodies are quite healing in their results. How we love the old familiar airs and hymn tunes we learned as children. The electrical effect of singing " Nearer my God to Thee " during theatre fire panics has been proved many times. The sight of a calm man in a turmoil is no doubt reassuring, but the sound of a firm confident voice in a crisis is much more effective. The good physician well knows the great value of firm confident positive assertions to his patients.' "

" Mr. Rustom further said that it is remarkable how the intensity of a sound will affect those hearing it. " ' Of course pleasant surroundings are nice and help towards comfort. We like good pictures in our homes, especially those that have a deep perspective, such as mountain or marine views ; but even more restful than these and more relaxing is the quiet happy voice of a loved member of the household. Perhaps we can never trace just what the evolution of the senses has been ; but it seems as though primitive men must have relied more upon hearing

than seeing, especially as they were more given to night prowling than we are.' Hence Mr. Rustom would rather possess his sense of hearing than his sense of sight."

It seemed as if the girl had caught Rustom's inspiration. She looked so eloquent, so grand and so proud as she spoke; proud as it were of the man whose utterances she was repeating. When it was over, there was another exchange of glances between the parents. Was it their own darling that was speaking or was it a fairy from the sky? Could the man who had so inspired her be so bad after all, mused the father. Were not vilification and wild tongues at work? Was not calumny on his track? Was he not the victim of slander which travels faster than a fiery steed, faster than lightning itself? Was he not himself young once and had he not suffered? Was he not despised and deserted, disconsolate and distressed? Aye, aye, would he not have succumbed if he had not by Hormuzd's grace faced the crisis boldly and saved the situation? Had he not the help of his better-half, which Rustom lacks and lacks so badly? Could not a wife like his,—Shirin for instance, but he dismissed the idea instantly,—save him? He felt a tingling and then a softening all over. He drew his daughter towards him and kissed her gently on the forehead. The mother felt drawn also and went through the osculatory ceremony on her own behalf. The father became more indulgent and said:

"So, Rusi can be serious when he chooses."

"And so amusing too, Papa. He told us that Thriti and Roshan are beautiful names, that Thriti reminds us naturally of our Prophet and Roshan of his Light and Leading, the candle of which will burn for ever. But, he said, the name Shirin is so grandly eloquent of its simplicity and sweetness; for does not the Persian word *shirin* mean all that is sweet on *terra firma?* He said he wanted to make a tour round the world. That is his beau ideal. He would go to Iran and read Shah-nameh in the very land of the

great Shahs. He knows Persian well ; doesn't he, father ? Where could he have studied it ? He makes time for study in the midst of his sprees, he says. He would then go to the wilds of Africa and to America. When there, he would take unto himself a dozen wives and he would call one of them Shirin, another Magdalene, another Thriti, another Roshan, and the rest of them by less charming names in the order of mental calibre and importance. He would have a group taken of these one dozen wives with himself as their head and send it down to us for our delectation. Won't you look at it, Mamma, when it is sent to us ? Shall we not send him, each of us, a separate letter of congratulation ? O Papa, how I wish we could also go to Iran and America ! I long for the day. I long to move. It would be so grand and so entertaining."

The father was overcome.

" Yes, darling," he said, " I am myself anxious to do that and see how Rustom fares there. He will not marry a single Red Indian, or a nigger either. But if he is good and persevering he can marry an American heiress or a Persian *huri*."

The girl's face clouded once more. She was too young to love, and her heart was entirely free and unassailed. She had never considered what love is. She had thought, it only helped authors to write stories. And yet there was an instinctive feeling in her when her father spoke of Rustom marrying an heiress or a *huri*. She took the one dozen wives business to be nothing but a myth.

" But, my dear," said the father, " now that I bethink me, how could you have committed Rusi's long lecture so well to memory ? It could not have been an exchange of brains ; though yours I am sure are anything but dull."

" Oh, that's simple enough, Papa. Whilst Rusi spoke Jal who wants to be an expert took notes in shorthand. Directly the speech was over he went to the typewriter and typed it away in

long hand, four copies in all, you know. He gave one to Thriti, one to the deaf man, and one to me, and kept the fourth for himself. See, here is that copy, Papa. All the while that it was raining I was hard at work committing the contents to memory. I did the same driving down here. Mr. Rusi said it reminded him of what Voltaire has said that 'of all robberies robbing another man's ideas is the least dangerous to society.' But, you know, Papa, I have not stolen his ideas. Won't you return that copy to me, Papa? Though it's not in his own hand I have vowed to preserve it."

The Papa was puzzled. Would it be wise to return the copy? And why not? he thought. It was all in the girl's memory as fast as it was on paper, and she could reproduce it. Besides it would be churlish not to return it.

"There, take it, child," he said, "there is no harm in preserving it. It is possible that it is someone else's ideas that Mr. Rustom has collected in the course of his reading. But that does not matter; for the matter of that we all live on other people's ideas."

At this minute Mr. Bahadurshah was seen to refer to his watch.

"In the name of Zoraster," he said, "it is half-past-eight. Time for dinner at nine. We must hie and offer up our prayers to the Giver of all bounties. Run, *beta*, ask Kavla to bring water here. We will perform *padiab* [1] and *kushti*."

[1] Applies to the process of ablution or the cleaning of the exposed portion of the body, *i.e.*, the feet, the hands and the face, with clean water. It is done before prayers, after answering the calls of nature, and even before luncheon and dinner.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HEARTS THAT MEET, WEEP, WEAVE AND WIN

" Such is the use and noble end of friendship,
To bear a part in every storm of fate,
And, by dividing, make the lighter weight."

HIGGINS.

THAT night Shirin was a bit silly. Shall we blame her for it? No. Why not? Because she did not know and did not wish to be silly. This silly condition of mind is not unusual in case of grown-up folk. In case of youth it is only stronger and more frequent.

It was bed-time. Silla was in her cosy little boudoir, which was all her own. A beautiful little lamp burned under a green shade. On ordinary occasions she would have betaken herself to her bed and would have been fast asleep. To-night she only betook herself to a chair near the lamp, removed a folded piece of paper which she had carefully stowed away where love-stricken girls usually do, unfolded it carefully and was seen deep down into it. The reader must have divined what paper it was. She had already learnt by heart the contents thereof; and all that was expected was that she would lock it up. But, no. She read it once, read it twice and read it fifty times over with occasional lapses of moody thoughts. Goodness knows how long the performance had continued but there was a disturbance.

" Shirinbai, what are you at? Have the *saheb loks* won the war? Or are the German *loks* here and are we all to die? *Jesu*, *Jesu*, may thou keep that day from us." The utterer whoever it was kissed the sacred cross which hung round her neck by a

string of glass beads and crossed herself devoutly. "But even if it be war news, *chhokri*, it surely cannot require so much reading. You read such big newspapers soon enough."

Who was the speaker? It was Shirin's ayah, Verodina; a middle-aged, respectable and trustworthy servant of long standing, who usually slept in her little *Baisaheb's* room. This worthy servant, like others of her class, was sitting up in her bed and offering up prayers before allowing Morpheus to overpower her. The prayers were long over and she waited in the hope of Shirin finishing her reading but when it looked as if it would never be finished she thought it time to interfere. It was good that she did so for it roused Shirin who soon collected her wondering thoughts and was herself again. Taking her tiny little key out of her pocket she unlocked her nice little escritoire, put the dear little piece of paper in it, locked it up and after assuring herself that it was quite secure she soon fell a-speaking.

"Ayah dear, it is not war news. It is—it is something more important, something which I wanted to carefully study. It is a lesson. The Germans are not coming here, Verodina dear; they never shall. You may make your mind easy about it."

"Make my mind easy, *chhokri?* You think there are no other troubles except the war. God has placed you and yours in ease and affluence and may He keep you so for ever and aye. But out there in our country there are other evils; influenza, plague, famine and cholera. The houses and even some of the streets are filled with the dead and the dying. *Chhokri, chhokri*, why would you not let me go and be near my dear ones? It is only my carcase that is here; my life and soul are there."

The *chhokri* appealed to thought of nothing but the ayah's words. The dear little paper and its contents were forgotten. She rose, threw her arms round the ayah's neck and mingled her own tears with hers. *Bara* ladies and *baisahebs* in British India and Britain will turn up their noses, contract their eyebrows and scowl

and growl at this natural exhibition of human feelings as pure, as grand and as good as nature itself, feelings which serve to bring together the high and the low, the mean and the mighty, feelings which are not infrequently felt on fields of war and in the midst of human worries and above all which bring us nearer and nearer unto God.

" Ayah dear, it is no use your asking to leave us. It will do no good to them or to you. You shall go but not now. We would be sinners if we allow you to go now. It would simply be sending you to certain death."

" If death is to come, it will, *chhokri*, *Jesu* looks to us all ; and there is this to comfort us." She held up the cross before the girl's eyes. The girl was a strict Zorastrian, but was not above admiring and honouring the simple convert's adopted faith.

" Ayah dear," she said, " yes, go on believing in that and you will be happy. No woe will betide them at Goa or befall you here. See, ayah dear, here is something that Mamma and Papa gave me on my birthday ; it is of no use to me but will be of great use to you." The same moment the girl emptied a little purse into the ayah's hand. " Nay, don't refuse it, it is not for you ; it is for those at Goa. I am free to do what I like with my own. If you like I will tell Mamma and Papa that I have forced it on you and they will not blame me for spending it in such a good cause."

So Shirin had preferred idealizing the real to realizing the ideal. She then betook herself to bed and slept the sleep of sweet innocence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

UNDER THE CLEAR CANOPY OF HEAVEN

" *Humble love*
And not proud reason, keeps the door of heaven ! "

YOUNG'S *Night Thoughts.*

THE inmates of Bahadur Mahal were early risers. The master of the Mahal had taken care to inculcate in the minds of those round him the saying of Poor Richard, " Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." Shirin had gone to bed late that night but on the day following she rose even earlier than usual ; rose fresh as the morn and radiant as the sun. She had slept the sleep of innocence, slept sound and undisturbed. Before the incidents of the previous day could invade her mind again she drew the *sor* of her wollen *sari* close over her head, pinned it under her pretty chin, threw her warm shawl over her shoulders, flew out into the compound and was soon at the gates.

She looked out into the long length of Pedder Road. It was so early that it was practically deserted. One end led to Mahalaxmi and the other met the Gowalia Tank and the Gibbs Roads. Rodolph had run after her unperceived and stood by quietly watching his mistress's movements. There were occasional sounds of the barking of dogs and the singing of birds. The only wayfarers were milkmen carrying pails of milk, sweeping women leisurely and lustily sweeping the road, *powwallas* carrying basketfuls of *pows* or loaves, barbers and Feringi butlers in their master's cast-off clothes going out to the market. Occasionally a motor was seen to glide swiftly by. There were a horseman or two who, whilst they passed by, nodded gallantly to Shirin and showed as if they would

have stopped and talked to her if she were so inclined. But she was not so inclined. She was a modest girl. She had never been within the inside of clubs and gymkhanas. She was not taught to court introduction or to introduce herself to any Bejan or Burjor, Pesi or Pheroze, who may like to rivet her attention or force his on hers. Clubs and the pell-mell comingling and conglomeration on male visitors' days of young men and women of different caste, colour and creed had not found favour with her father. Clubs, he said, were not for the young. They must be, he said, for men advanced in years who would otherwise vegetate and wither away in the unrelieved silence of their homes. They were certainly not for girls or even young ladies, Mr. Bahadurshah would urge, unless they wanted to be young reprobates. He hated the tone and tendency of the boys and girls of the period, their laxity and their luxuriousness, their unfinished morals and manners, their increasing taste or mania as he said for dances and tableaux and above all for their fantastic mode of dress and hair dressing.

Shirin was about to return to the house when Rodolph gave evidence of his presence. He pulled and tugged at his mistress's *sari* and showed as if he wanted to draw her attention to some one who was approaching from the Mahalaxmi end of the road. The next moment the dog ran to welcome the approacher who was no other than Rusi. He was within a few yards of the house now and his eyes met those of the girl standing at the gate. He removed his felt hat and bowed low to the lady in his usual semi-serious, semi-jocular fashion, making his friend Rodolph walk along with him on his hind legs. Shirin hesitated for a moment, then showed as if she had not recognized Rustom, turned away and was making her way to the house, when she heard Rustom calling out:

"Silla, Shirin, Shirinbai, please don't run away; I am not a German—I am to go to Africa and America, not to Germany; you know I told you all about it yesterday."

There was no alternative now for Shirin but to stop and meet

Rustom. Within the few moments that they had espied each other, her father's opinion of Rustom had rushed to her mind. He must have risen by this time or must rise shortly and miss her. It was not usual for her to stroll out so early. What would he think if he saw her with Rustom ? Would he not take it that it was all pre-concerted ? There was a warm glow on her cheeks and she blushed. She would not extend her hand to Rustom but could not refuse to take his which was extended towards her. The meeting of the hands made the man the master. He made for a bench which stood under a cluster of trees and the girl feeling a peculiar sensation creeping all over her, a sensation of strange pleasure which she could not divine, walked as if in a daze by his side.

They seated themselves on the bench, the four-footed mounting and seating himself between them. A pretty morning picture it was. There was a silence which Rustom broke. He had not failed to notice that the girl had recognized him and wanted to avoid him. He could have waited the whole day, aye even for days, and could not have divined the cause. He had not the slightest idea of what was passing in his companion's mind. He wished he could read it but he was helpless. He wished the Blind Doctor were by his side. He would have read her mind as he had read that of Thriti. But he was not to be daunted and he went boldly at it.

" Well, Shirin, is the ugly man so very ugly to-day, that the fair lady would not so much as look at him ? You know the ugly beast is going to betake himself to the jungles shortly and will trouble your ladyship's eyes no more."

" Mr. Rustom, Rustomji, you don't mean to say I wanted to avoid you ! I—I— " and then she stopped.

" Untruth cannot walk in the path of truth," observed Rustom. " You were about to say something, Shirin, that would not have been truthful and like the true daughter of a true father you stopped. You were so free and frank with me yesterday. You were in the same stall with us yesterday ; you are in the reserved

box to-day and are looking on this biped and this quadruped as stage-players from a distance."

" I—I did not mean to be reserved. I am not so proud or changeable either," faltered the girl.

" Then it must be I that has changed. I was bad enough yesterday, for I bored you all with a big tirade ; and I must be worse to-day, for I am boring you now."

Shirin tried to speak but she could not.

" Come, *Baishaheb*," said Rustom, " tell me the truth. I see from your face that you want to do it. But I see you are afraid of someone, perhaps your father, disapproving of it."

Rustom felt that he was hard. He had no right to stand in the light of a Father Confessor to the girl and to force a confession from her. He had never dreamt of being in love with her. If anything he thought she was too young and innocent to love anyone, much less ' the wayward beast ' as he styled himself. But he could see that there was a burden on her mind, which she could not lift herself ; but she would not be displeased if someone else helped her to remove it. He was not joking when he told people that he would be leaving Bombay for a long time to come ; and he could not bear to think that anyone of his select set should think ill of him. For all others he did not care.

" Shirin," he proceeded, " if I am not changed or gone from bad to worse between last evening and this morning, sure enough someone has been speaking to you about me and painting me bad, someone that likes me and yet tries to persuade himself that he does not. I say ' he ', because I don't think it's a ' she '.

The girl's look expressed surprise. She fixed her black orbs fully on the man that was addressing her. Her lips moved as if in silent prayer. It was not prayer, however, but admiration ;—admiration for the man whom she had so freely admired before her father only last evening ; admiration for the man who was now reading her all over like a book.

" Rus—Rustomji, I have never thought ill of you and I—I will try never to do it say what they will."

" But if your father says it, will you not then believe it ? Is he not always right ? Do not the best of men at times judge from appearances and are not appearances often deceitful ? I will not blame your father, Shirin, if he has told you that I am bad and that you should not associate with me. If he were Rustom and I Behman, I might perhaps have done the same."

This was a poser. The girl tried to reply. It was not in her nature to prevaricate. All she could do was to melt into tears. Rustom unconsciously extended his hand and she took it, sister-like if you will so have it. The reserve, if any, on her side vanished into the thin morning breeze, vanished as if on the wings of the dove.

" O Rusi," she murmured, " I knew you were keen and wise but I did not know you were much wiser. I did not want to tell you an untruth and will not do so even though I find myself in a predicament now. Someone told me," she proceeded, gently withdrawing her hand from his and looking down much abashed, " you are not so good and so wise as he would wish you to be ;— someone who thinks you could be better and wiser if you choose."

" And that someone is the speaker's father, the owner of Bahadur Mahal. Am not I right, Shirin ? "

The Shirin appealed to remained silent, which implied consent.

" And did that someone tell you," continued the questioner, " why he thinks me to be so bad ? Does he take me to be incorrigible ? Is there no hope of redemption for the reprobate ? "

The woman was all in the man's hands now ; and she murmured half to herself and half to the man.

" He said if you had not the misfortune to be an orphan so early in life the tender offices of your mother would have stood you in capital stead."

"It would have kept me from going bad or prevented me from becoming worse ; is it not ? But he knows I have no mother who could improve me ; what then ?"

The girl hesitated a moment and then said, "The softening influence of a partner in life. I do not say it myself, Rustomji. I only repeat what my father said."

"And if the partner in life does not come seeking me, what then ? Did he say I must go seeking her ?"

Strange and diverse feelings fought for victory in the girl's heart. She wished she could know herself. She wished she could divine the undefinable that was rising from her heart to her throat and almost choking her.

As Shirin remained silent Rustom repeated his question which elicited a clever reply.

"Well, I did not ask him to say that and he did not say it."

"Well, but what do you say to it ? If a partner in life does not come seeking me must I go seeking her ?"

"How can I answer that ? But I suppose you must, or at least you should set about it carefully," said the girl.

"Set about it carefully ? Would my lady deign to explain it ?"

The my lady so addressed looked at her feet and not at the questioner's face.

"I cannot explain it myself ; but if it were left to my father, whose thoughts and ideas are almost my own now, I think he would say, Mr. Rustom, you are of that age now when you should abandon once and for ever all your lighter ways, careless habits, little follies and unlovely doings, and change—O, what shall I say ?—I cannot find the exact words."

"Let me supply them then. Change from the idler to the industrious, from the go-me-where to the sit-at-home and sticker-to-the-official-stool, from the wayward to the wiseacre, from the bold stander-up for innocence and suppressor of bullyism to the devil-may-care, disdainful and conceited coxcomb, in short from

the selfless Samaritan to the selfish live-for-self and die-for-self."

This was spoken in that peculiar tone which was Rustom's own, spoken so seriously and yet so jocularly that for the first time after their morning-meeting the clouded face of the girl cleared, the merry twinkle returned to her eyes and the sweet little smile to her rosy lips.

"O Rusi!" And the words seemed to jump smilingly out of her lips. "O Rusi! It's not quite what my father would have said. He would have said, Rustomji, before you go seeking a nice little partner in life, one who would make you happy, deserve before you desire. Be you serious, steady, industrious and earning. O, but I forgot my father's most important remark. It was that long ere this you could have stood in the light of a son and heir to Mehelooji, who would have adopted you but——"

"— but for my nasty ways and ill-doings: is it not? I have great respect for your father, Shirin, and deference for his opinion; but if becoming Mehelooji's son and heir mean anything like being serious, steady, industrious and earning, I would rather not be his son at all. Being adopted son to a wealthy man means to my mind, plain and simple, falling flat on the adopted father's shoulders. An adopted son must be an adept: he may or may not like his adopted father or his ways but he must please him and pat him, flatter him and fawn on him, believe one thing and make him believe another. I have no faith in this *palak*[1] business, Shirin. If I ever take an adopted father or become his *palak* I would certainly be Mehelooji's. But, you see, there are serious objections to that. Becoming his *palak* means being doomed down to Bombay, rolling in ease and comfort, practising the rôle of *Shethia*[2] and patron, and in brief never moving hand or foot to uplift one's own self nor to uplift those who want to be uplifted. Then again, you see, Silla,—"

[1] An adopted son.

[2] A big-wig or a leading man of the community.

At the word Silla a quick change passed over Shirin's face. It was quick to come but not so quick to disappear. Her frame seemed to shake. The word seemed to tingle her whole being. She unconsciously wished she would go on hearing that sweet little word from Rusi's mouth for ever. Rustom did not know what it all meant and went on to say :

"Then, again, you see, Silla, becoming Mehelooji's son and heir means that I should be son to my own sister and to my brother-in-law. I should have to call them mother and father. Luckily I am not their senior ; but were I ten years their elder I suppose our *revaj*[1] would have bidden me to be their son all the same. I have known of uncles being adopted as their younger nephews' sons."

Shirin laughed and her laughter seemed to inspire her four-footed companion who looked up joyfully into her face and romped about her.

"As to my nasty ways and evil doings, Silla, I will tell you what !" proceeded Rustom. "I was once fined rupees fifty for thrashing within an inch of his life a rich Parsi bravado who used to thrash his poor over-obedient wife for any imaginary sin of omission or commission. The Magistrate whilst fining me seemed as if he approved of what I had done ; for at times he showed as if he would jump out of his chair and give a taste of his dog-whip to the complainant. On another occasion I was taken up for giving a taste of his own whip to a *gariwalla* who was insulting a lady passenger. On this occasion the Magistrate was pleased to take a different view of the offence and fined the *gariwalla* rupees twenty. The lady passenger, who was a rich Parsi lady, being told by an over-obliging person that I was poor, sent me five rupees for my trouble, which I very thankfully returned to her. I was once charged with obstructing a policeman in the discharge of his duty. It was twelve noon, and I saw the policeman roughly handling a poor labour-cart-

[1] A custom in vogue or usage, an observance as opposed to religion.

driver and charging him with driving on the wrong side of the road. When being so handled the cartman was on the right side of the road. I told the policeman that the man could not have flewn from the wrong to the right side all in a moment. The matter was taken to the court and the case was discharged by the Magistrate on the evidence of a respectable eye-witness, who was no other than Miss Shirin Bahadurshah's humble and apologetic servant Rustom Delaver. The charge of obstruction against me which was next on the list of hearing was then withdrawn by the police. Some of my other nasty things, Shirin, are that I don't increase the Government revenue by taking to dice, drink and tobacco, like many Parsi young men of the day, or don't increase the over-increased revenues of the Turf Club of the *gora sahebs* in Bombay and Poona by going to those slaughter-alive races, which our wise Government so wisely and so judiciously protract for the utter ruin of their countrymen, who do not know where to stove away the heaps they collect. I have never seen the inside of a jail or ever ruined or harmed a creditor by taking advantage of the over-indulgent Insolvent Debtors' Act. This Act is another masterful piece of British wisdom. Why, what brings me here to-day, Silla ? "

Silla who was deeply taken with that sweet word from Rustom's mouth did not answer but looked demure.

" Why have I come here to-day, Silla ? " Rustom went on. " It is to return a certain amount which your father was good enough to lend me on my mere word of mouth and which I wanted to give to a friend in distress. Your father never bargained for time or interest and never reminded me about the loan. But I have come all the same to refund it to him. You seem surprised, Silla ! Where has this money come from, you would ask ? It is the savings from my income from contributions to the press."

" It is very creditable to you, Rusi," said Silla.

" I wish your father would say so, Shirin. Times were when

he would have said so but times are different now. Times were when sitting in yonder verandah of that beautiful bungalow your father took pleasure in relating to me all the worries and troubles of his young days, his reverses and retreats, his rises and onward moves, his runs and his scores, his bowled-outs and bailed-outs in the battle of life and such like entertaining and encouraging stories. He had told me of his disappointments and hopes and ultimate success in the fray ; above all he had ended by saying, do all, Rusi, so long as you do nothing to disgrace yourself or your family. I was then what I am now. That edifice stands where it is now. This dog here is the same faithful quadruped now that he was then and—and—you, Silla, are as innocent, kind, loving and affectionate now in that beautiful *sari* of yours as when a rather big-looking doll over-growing her frock. Your father is the same now that he then was except in one thing ; and that one thing is his opinion of poor me. What was then youth, courage and emboldenment is now rashness, roughness, indecorum and indignity in his eyes. Thank God, Mehelooji is different. He does not take me to be a pattern of virtue, nor an embodiment of youthful vices or all that is bad in youth. He does not take me to be incorrigible."

If ever Rusi was serious, or if ever he looked mournful, Shirin felt that it was now. It moved her to tears, which Rusi was not slow to notice. She felt irresistibly drawn towards him at that moment. And were is the girl that would not have ? One of her tiny little hands was placed over his shoulder and she murmered :

" Believe me, Rusi, standing out under this clear canopy of heaven and in the sight of Him who hears all I tell you that, if ever I felt doubtful about you those doubts are from this day forward shattered and I scatter them to the winds even as this dust on Rody's back." With her right hand on Rusi's shoulder with her left she cleaned out the dust from the back of this quadruped, who as if knowing what was passing was gazing wonderfully into theirs eyes.

"Rusi," proceeded Shirin, "I don't know if you have ever liked me; but—but—let me tell you that I have always—"

"—disliked me," put in Rustom.

The next moment, seeing the pang in her face, he changed. "No, Silla, I was only joking. I see that you have always liked me, and that you have never taken me to be so bad or incorrigible as I have been painted. I feel for you and will avoid meeting you alone as your father might misconstrue it. It is possible we may not meet again before I leave Bombay for a long long time to come." He took her hand and shook it affectionately.

"But you will go in, Rusi, you will go in with me to my father. You forget you want to return him the money. Go in with me you shall. I shall certainly tell my father all that you have told me now."

"Sorry if I displease you, Shirin, but I had rather not go in with you. I have changed my mind and you will oblige me if you really like me by not pressing me to accompany you. All the same this money here shall go to your father to-day with a letterful of my heartfelt thanks."

His left hand unconsciously strayed to his pocket and brought out a little bundle of bank-notes before the tear-dimmed eyes of his companion.

"Come, give it to me, Rusi," she said firmly as if determined not to accept a refusal. "Give it to me. I shall give it to my father. It will tell him what you had come for. It will prevent me from keeping back from him a full and free account of our meeting and telling him frankly that I do not agree with him in his opinion of you."

"But, Shirin, you will surely count the money and assure yourself that it is all right."

"It must be so, Rusi; but if there be a deficit I shall make it up. I shall not merely tell you that you are a little goose, just a wee bit of a rogue for cheating me, but will call upon you to

repay that deficit with interest."

She laughed, or rather forced out a little bit of a laugh. Rustom catching the infection laughed too. By way of silent approval the dog lifted himself on his hind legs and licked her hands lovingly. Rustom moved the dog away and cleaned the girl's hands with his kerchief. The Parsis are a peculiarly cleanly race. They will not rest or feel easy until they have washed out the loving lick even of a little poodle. This sense of purity is inherent in them. It is the basis of Zorastrianism, which inculcates and enjoins purity of person, purity of mind, purity of heart, speech and action. There was a water-tap close by. They put their hands under it and cleaned them. The clean hands of two clean consciences met once again.

" Good-bye, Rusi," said the girl.

" Good-bye, Silla, and God bless you," said the youth.

There were tears in the eyes of the tender one and the eyes of the harder one were not undimmed. And so they parted company ; the man all unconscious of the feelings with which he had inspired the girl and the girl all unconscious of the nature of but overpowered by the intensity of her own feelings. The dog ran to the gate to see the guest off.

From that day forward Silla the divine was Silla the sulky. She spoke but little and at times not until she was spoken to. She became thoughtful and was occasionally very moody. What she was thinking of, the reader can easily imagine. She was seen to be looking often and for long minutes into a picture album and was displeased when she was disturbed. The female parent tried to find the cause of her sudden fondness for the album but she could not. The male parent was more 'cute and not so slow to know the cause. Silla had run to answer the door-bell once and in her hurry to see who it was that was ringing she had left the album open. The father who was in the room took the album, looked at the particular page and the photo in it and learnt what he wanted

to, all in a trice. Before Shirin could return he had replaced the album where it was. She had told him of her meeting with Rusi and told him all that had passed between them. She had told him how she had tried to keep his opinion of Rusi from him and how courteously and cleverly he had abstracted it from her. All this was said so freely and frankly and withal so resolutely that he could not find it in him to blame her or to disapprove of what she had done. She had not asked him if after all that she had narrated to him he had changed his opinion of Rustom in justice to him. No, that she had not and would not do. She was her father's daughter and so like him. But if she had asked him what then? Would he have informed her that he had changed his opinion of Rustom and that Rustom was not so bad after all? Perhaps he would have and perhaps he would not have. Parents have very grave duties to perform by their children and very solemn responsibilities to discharge. If you are a parent, reader, you will know it all easily.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE PAIN WITHOUT THE PEACE OF DEATH

" Truth crushed to earth shall rise again ;
The eternal years of God are hers ;
But error wounded writhes in pain,
And dies among her worshippers."

BYRANT'S *The Battlefield.*

THE old order changeth, yielding place to new ; and God fulfils Himself in many ways. This is true all over the world. Why should it not then be in the case of Sherbanoo Dalal? The hand of God seemed to be in her illness and through it it wanted to work a great reformation in a small but turbulent family. The turbid waters were to be drifted asunder.

Shera's illness rose to a pitch. Sudden illness becomes as suddenly serious. The family Doctor, when he called again in the night, found his patient worse and would not leave her. Magdalene was there and so was Mrs. Mortimer. They sat up with the patient in turns. Magdalene had dispatched short and hasty epistles to her father and her friends and not the least to Ardeshir and Roshan.

Some strange feeling, a something indefinable within her which she could not herself understand, had led Shera on to apply to that ministering angel Magdalene who though not a nurse by profession was still Shera knew a great Sister of Mercy. It seemed as if she wanted to make up for the injustice that she had done to Magdalene even at the risk of submitting her to the taunts of Meherbanoo and Erach.

It is said that there are always two parties to a quarrel. They are not, however, always on a par. They are both either equal or unequal participants in the

fray. They may be both active, or one active and the other passive. They may be both guilty, or one guilty and the other entirely innocent, aye, even ignorant of the real cause of the fray. And yet it has perforce to participate. All this was true of Meherbanoo and Sherbanoo, who as the reader knows were seekers of the quarrel with those with whom they should have lived in peace and amity, with the aid of their plenty, which is said to be the promoter of those two elements of human happiness. All this was true of Ardeshir and Roshan, of Jerbanoo, Thriti and Jal, of Jamshed and Magdalene. But the greatest analogy that stands elevated before us here, is that, the aggressive party knowing that the aggressed is innocent yet presses the quarrel hard on him, even takes it to his very door. This was also true in the case of those with whom we are now concerned. But it weighed heavily on the vanquished. Shera found herself vanquished sooner than her mother did and she collapsed. It went home to her with singular avidity that the quarrel was of their own seeking and that those whom they had dragged into it certainly did not want it. It also came home to her that the draggers were now the dragged for she knew that both her mother and herself had dragged themselves into the mire of shame and humiliation.

Poor Shera! Could those who knew her, could those who had seen her only twenty-four hours before, aye, could even her own mother say it was the self-same headstrong, frantic girl that was lying now on that bed, helpless as a babe? Where had all her pride gone? It had only gone before destruction, dissolution you might say; for it was that that stared her in the face. There were times when she lay quiet with Magdalene's hand clasped in her own. There were times when she was delirious and raved; raved against herself, raved against her mother and raved against Erach. She had her moments of sense and moments of entire aberration of mind. During the former she would not allow either her mother or the one on whom she was

always so sweet to approach her. She showed her open disgust for them. She became excited if they did not leave her. This excited those two. They offered small slights, even insults, by means of hints and innuendos, to Magdalene. But she showed as if she did not understand them.

" Look at that mother of Christ. Look at that Saviour. Is this not a Parsi house, Meherbanoo ? Are there not Christian houses to go to ? " Erach would ask. And the addressee would reply, " Oh ! She has mistaken the place, mistaken her vocation ; she has come to the wrong shop, may be she will find it out soon enough." Luckily for Shera, the saviour had found the speakers out and she meant to stick to her post bravely. Every time serves for the matter that is then born in it, but time does not wait ; when one matter is over another is born to it. Shera went from bad to worse and from worse to bad, until she went worst, so worst that her life was despaired of. If anything was wanted to break the pride of the mother and the pride of the lover, it was this. They were unnerved and crushed. The misguided mother begged of the Doctor, begged of the consultant, begged of the nurse, begged even of Magdalene, to save her. There were moments when she would have given years of her life to do so.

Friendship can but smoothe the front of despair. Magdalene was a real friend ; she had stood at many a bedside and many a deathside. Her friendship for the one, who was so unfriendly to her at first but who had invoked it in the time of her dire necessity, was too sincere to be doubted. So the human hands present did their best but God's own good hand was withheld. Where glory recommends the grief, despair disdains the healing. They told Shera that her illness was not serious at all but she did not seem to listen. Her thoughts were far away.

CHAPTER XL

THE SUNBURST IN THE STORM OF DEATH

"When lovely woman stoops to folly
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy,
What art can wash her guilt away?
The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom is—to die."

GOLDSMITH.

TIME thus wore on until it came to the point where it had to bid good-bye to the matter of Shera and take up another matter. A full week had rolled on during which Magdalene had only thrice visited her father. The Bahadurshahs and the Meheloojis and Rustom looked after him and left Magdalene free to look after Shera. Things fall in in the order of good and evil. It was all bad before; it was all good now. The evil was evanescent; the good promised to be lasting. It had come to stay.

It was the day on which the Magistrate was to give his decision in that mighty case of blood *versus* blood. The decision was to be given at the opening of the court. The Magistrate was told that the complainants could not attend owing to the serious illness, the almost impending death of the second complainant. Thus when the scene of the decision was being enacted at the court, one of quite a different nature was being enacted at the abode of the complainants. The decision was to show that the real culprits were not the accused but the complainants. The ends of justice were being adjudicated at the same time, though in two different places; one the human court and the other the divine. It was an

irony of fate. Shera had often asked both in her ravings and in her awakenings if the decision had been given. She had then gone on to say, it must be the acquittal of the innocents and the conviction of the guilty. She said that guilt was hardest when it was nearest home, that it was already near enough to her and therefore but too hard for her to bear. She said that God had yoked misery to guilt; she was guilty and therefore very very miserable. Death alone could end it.

"Miss Macgregor, Magdalene, can I hope for your pardon? Will they also pardon me? I mean, my father and sister, who are so very very dear to me now. Magdalene, I am going now. It is no use your trying to make me believe I am not. Something tells me, God tells me, I must be with Him. Thank God, He has called me to Him before I became a hardened sinner. May His mercy move my mother's heart also. May she see the follies of her ways and repent for her mistakes. And may—may Erach repent and be good for ever after."

What could poor Magdalene say or do? She could only weep and go on weeping. Shera pressed her for the pardon.

"I have nothing to pardon you for, Sherbanoo," said Magdalene. Sherbanoo raised her poor emaciated hand with difficulty and put it over the speaker's mouth. The speaker pressed it gently to her lips and kissed it.

"Won't you call me dear Shera, Magdalene, if but for once only, though I don't deserve it?" It was a signal for another outburst of tears for Magdalene. She laid her hand gently on the invalid's breast and said between her tears:

"Dearest, dearest Shera, I do pardon you, pardon you with all my heart and soul as I am a true Christian and so help me God." Her listener was not quiet yet.

"But what about the others?" she asked. "Will they also pardon me? O my poor father! O my poor sister! How have I hurt you both! How have I harmed you! How unjust and unfair

I was to you! Why are they not here, dearest Magdalene?"

"Here we are," said two voices near her. They were those of Ardeshir and Roshan. The voices were shaken and weak with grief. They were both overpowered. They went up to Shera and the spell was broken. The forsaken father had come to the daughter and the long forgotten little sister to the elder one who had so long forsaken them both. The tall figure of the father bent low and was soon locked into the daughter's embrace. The sister was not slow to follow. It was a scene that could have moved the hardest sinner. It was a tableau for the pen of a poet or the brush of a painter. It was at once heart-rending and heart-joining. Magdalene stood by, singularly affected. She was devout and her lips moved in prayer. Sorrow and silence are strong and for a minute or two they ruled supreme in the room. Who was Magdalene that she should disturb them? She continued to pray until the father himself broke the silence.

"Shera, darling, you will believe me when I tell you that you are dearer to me now than my own self. O, that we had never been estranged! O, that we had never quarrelled! Quarrel is Satan's own work and he has been the victor. But with God's help we will yet vanquish him. You shall live, Shera. The Almighty cannot be so cruel. He must have done this to bring us together."

"Don't deceive yourself, father dear," said the girl faltering. "Dearest sister! O, let me drink in the sweet of these words, let me drink them to the full, drain them to the last dreg. For, I have never tasted of their sweet nor drunk of them before."

It was Roshan that was now on her breast. She was speechless. It seemed that life and soul had both left her. But she could listen and she did it intently.

"Roshan, my own dear Roshan, you are *roshni* (light) itself; let me look for it. Look at me; there, I see it in your eyes. Oh, what world of love have I lost? The Lord forgive her and

forgive me !"

She ceased ; and Roshan burst forth.

"Shera, Shera, you are not going to die. He will not be so cruel. We have prayed to Him and will pray to Him to save you. We have been here often but the doctors were afraid our meeting would excite you. The doctors were wrong. I told father they were. O, my sister ! My sister ! My own dear dear sister ! Come what may I shall not leave you now. Father will also stay. See, here are Thriti and Jal." She ran towards them, took them by the hand and drew them towards the bed. They were all weeping.

" O, Thriti ! O, Jal ! Your pardon. O, cruel, cruel that I was ! Better for you Thriti that you cannot see me, better that your eyes cannot rest on me ; for I am not fit for you to see. My eyes will be of no more use to me now. I wish I could give them to you without their sin. I wish I could take with me there yours, blind but holy as they are. Come Thriti, embrace me. Jal, my own dear dear brother, come to me. I see Death's pale signal advancing. Let my eyes look their last on you. Let my arms take their last embrace."

It was the voice of the dying that had thus gone forth. The cousins embraced, embraced as they had never done before, embraced but once and for ever. There were to be no more embraces for them here below.

At that moment the doctors came in, followed by Meherbanoo and Erach. The doctors looked at the patient and examined her quietly. The patient was quiet and seemed to be gently passing away, passing away in the peace that was at last vouchsafed to her. It was the peace of coming death. They could not fail to perceive it and could not controvert it. The Doctor then beckoned to the mother and whispered to her.

The mother approached the daughter. Shera looked up and their eyes and hands met. There was another solemn silence, silence which is so cruel. With difficulty the daughter spoke.

"Hug me, mother," she managed to murmur, "hug me if you like for you will do it in this world no more. Say, if you will, that you pardon me ; for myself I am sorry, aye, extremely sorry, if I offended you."

Her tones faltered more and more.

"Mother, I have a request to make. It is a death-bed request and you will grant it. It is an atonement for me and an atonement for you. Promise, Oh—Oh—I feel a strange gurgling at the throat. —I am going ! Water ! Water !"

Magdalene brought the feeding cup ; but her hand shook so that Jamshed took it in his and applied it to Shera's lips. She opened her eyes, recognised her cousin who was her fiancé, and her hand struggled for his. He took it and kissed it. He then bent low and kissed her on the forehead. She looked greatly pleased. She had now regained just enough strength to speak.

"Promise me, mother, promise me on this sacred Avesta which has never left me since I took to this bed, that you will be a wife unto father and a mother unto sister as you should be. If you have ever loved me and like that I should look on you with pleasure from the heavens above, promise, that—that—henceforth you will live with them in peace and concord. Mother, promise."

The mother promised and the daughter died. There is no death in life. Death gives but wings to life : The real life is there. Shera had flown on those wings to live a holy life there, such life as was not vouchsafed to her here below.

* * *

I have given you a little time, reader, to recover yourself and to let you imagine for yourself the feelings of the various parties that had gathered round Shera, Shera the dying, and who would perhaps never have gathered round Shera the living. It was but another irony of fate. It brought with it its concomitant and that was tears. Tears, the noble language of the eyes, which flow from the high and the humble alike ; tears, that are women's

wealth and web ; tears, that are men's forte ; tears, that are children's pleasure and the sick man's pain. Tears may be silent or articulate. They are a luxury to the happy. They are but a worthless token of unreal grief. Love is said to be loveliest when embalmed in tears.

A few minutes more ; and there was a great deal of weeping, some beating of breasts and some striking of heads, both from those who were in the room and from those who were in another room at that time but who had rushed in when the Grim Visitor's presence in the house was announced. Each felt and each wept according to the nature and extent of his or her feeling. The feeling of Ardeshir and Roshan was too deep for grief or for tears. Their tears, instead of sliding out had slided in and dried up. They were too deep for an exhibition. The mother's grief and her tears were loudest in proportion. Their vehemence could only be equalled by that of the womenfolk in the other room who had rushed there to allay grief but who were only aggravating it. They knew that Meherbanoo would not be unfavourable to the breast-beat drum and they were not slow to sound it with their long tongue accompaniment. Every little act, good or bad, small or great, act of vice or of virtue, and every sin either of commission or of omission of the husband and wife, the dead and the alive and of their friends and foes, were ranged in martial array and mournfully paraded before the eyes of the other mourners. So much for those who had come to condole but had remained only to cater and to cavil. Each substance of the grief, in the words of the great poet, had twenty shadows for them which showed like the grief itself but were not so.

The eyes of Magdalene, Thriti and Jal, Dinbanoo, Chandan and Shirin glazed with blinding tears. Their grief, like that of the father and daughter, was silent but not small. The weeping blind, if she be a lovely woman, looks divine. Thriti was both. She therefore looked like a divine goddess, like Madonna in grief.

And what about Erach ? He stood by at a distance and wept tears of bitter woe. He had entirely forgotten the insult that Shera had offered him. He was like a man walking in a dream, a weary wight with hopes forlorn. He almost wished he was in Shera's place then. As regards the other men that had gathered there, the occasional application of kerchief to their eyes showed that their eyes were not unmoistened. They were affected and afflicted as all good men are in such affliction.

It was time for the obsequies. The males rose, bowed reverently to the dead and walked out. Seated in a corner was Magdalene, with Roshan locked in her arms on one side and Shirin nestling to her on the other. Dinbanoo and Chandan were helping Magdalene to comfort Roshan.

" Roshan dear," whispered Magdalene, " don't weep like that. It breaks my heart. I must now be going. I am not a Parsi, though I have long been one of you. They call us *Juddins* [1] ; with the dead body in the house I cannot stay here long. Your ceremonies will soon be adoing. Come, Roshan dear, kiss me ; see, Silla is here Here are Dinbanoo and Chandanbai. I can leave you in no better hands than theirs."

She then gently disengaged herself, kissed Roshan over and over again, embraced Shirin, Dinbanoo and Chandan ; and tearing herself away from them walked to the door. Then, remembering something she came back to where Meherbanoo was. She was doubtful if she should shake hands with her or embrace her. Amongst the Parsis, the latter is the most effective mode of expressing grief or affection, even pleasure. She looked at Meherbanoo and her spirits failed. She saw at once that Meherbanoo was not prepared to return her advances which were only too sincere.

" With your leave, Meherbanoo, I shall now go. I would stay but I don't think it is allowable. Will you believe me when

[1] A term used by Parsis for all those who are not Parsi Zorastrians.

I say how very sorry I am for what has occurred? There is now nothing for you but to trust in Him and— "

" Yes, Miss Macgregor, I don't think we need detain you any longer. Good-bye." Meherbanoo would not shake hands and abruptly turned away.

Magdalene felt mystified, felt that she was grossly misjudged and as grossly ill-treated. All the same, she had done her duty and could do no more. She then left the room but not before she had heard the womenfolk whispering silly remarks about her. " Who is that *Madamdi* [1] ? " asked one. " Goodness knows who she is," replied another. " What airs she puts on, though she must be only a nurse?" remarked one. " May be; why waste words on her? Don't these nurses abound now ? " queried another. " These Christian *pories* [2] poke their heads everywhere nowadays ; they make themselves so cheap to our married men and marriageable men. They are at the root of the *Juddin* contest." The tongues that so wagged were of those whom the *Juddin*-mania had touched to the quick. They were of those that were contaminated by the cant of *Juddin* chanters. It was the blindness of racial prejudices and unreligious and orthodox predispositions,—as unlike the Zorastrian religion as an apple to an onion. Avaunt on such views ! Avaunt on the injustice which they in their gross ignorance did to model Magdalene. If they had looked into their hearts, looked into the truth, they could surely have felt how low down they sank in comparison.

[1] Corrupted form of ' madam ' which is used to express contempt.

[2] A contemptuous term used for girls.

CHAPTER XLI

THE DECISION

"Where the fault springs, there let the judgment fall."

HERRICK.

THE day at last dawned which was to decide the fate of the brother and the sister. It was the day that was destined to conclude that highly interesting drama of life but it was powerless to drop the curtain over it for ever. For the drama was not only to be the topic of the day or the month alone but of several months to come. It was one out of the hundreds of days, which were big with the fate of France, big with the fate of Belgium, big with the fate of Servia, big with the fate of Europe and no less big with the fate of India itself and of the world. The interest that hung over the fate of Jal and Thriti had so much in common with the interest that then hung over the fate of the whole humanity. One would think that the cause of innocence and truth and the ends of justice would be vindicated in the case of Jal and Thriti as in the case of the entire European world. Let the reader read and see for himself.

There is no interest so great as that which hangs over the fate of injured innocence. Interest creates curiosity and curiosity no less than devotion makes pilgrims. So curious pilgrims mustered strong and flocked to the pilgrimage. Custom is the pillar round which opinion twines and interest is the tie that binds it. Here was custom and here was opinion. The spectators were the customers and they had already formed their opinion that the accused were innocent. If the Magistrate was going to pronounce

them guilty they would say that he did not know his business.

But whatever the opinion of the bar and the bench and the pilgrims, nature seemed to have decided the matter ; and as if to awake them all to a sense of its importance it gave them a warning shock. When the court had sat Mr. Khatkhate rose and informed the Magistrate that the second complainant could not be present in the court as she was between life and death. She was seriously ill and the doctors had despaired of her life. The Magistrate would therefore kindly pass an order to dispense with her presence. If he required a medical certificate there it was. He, Mr. Khatkhate, would beg that the Magistrate would also dispense with the presence of Bai Meherbanoo. She was the second complainant's mother and must be near her daughter. His Worship had the power to decide the case in the complainants' absence and Mr. Khatkhate had no doubt he would exercise that power.

"Mr. Aga," said the Magistrate, "this is very unpleasant news. I am sure we are all very sorry to hear it. The second complainant cannot be present in the court. The first complainant must be if we wish it. I do not wish it and will dispense with her presence also unless you have anything to urge against it."

Mr. Aga said he had nothing to say against it.

The Magistrate then made an order dispensing with the presence of both the complainants. As defendants' counsel Mr. Aga then opened his peroration.

"Your Worship," he said, "this case is as gloomy and heart-stirring as it is singular. But with all that it is not the less bright and simple. It is gloomy because of the dark side of human nature that it discloses ; heart-stirring because of the grave issues involved in it ; singular because it is once in half a century that we have such a case before us. It is lucky for humanity that they are not many. Why is the case bright ? It is bright, I say, because of the vivid traces of the white side of human nature which it contains. It is simple, because it is so easy to decide. As the Counsel

of the accused, the court will think that I should be the last person to make the last observation. And why ? Because the task of defence is not a bed of roses. It has many thorns and compared to the task of Counsel for the prosecution it is fraught with many and more serious difficulties.

" When I undertook to defend the accused—it goes to my heart to call them by that name—I knew the difficulties I would have to surmount. But I had a duty to perform. And I knew I could do it with a clear conscience. Right is on our side and I mean to prove that Right is Might in this case.

" Who are the accused in this case ? Are they professional thieves, disreputable rogues, hardened criminals, house-breakers' apprentices, or dangerous members of society ? The answer to all this is, No—nothing of the kind. Have they ever seen the inside of a jail ? No. Were they ever charged with theft and acquitted for first offence ? No. Were they ever in court before ? No. Then who are they and why are they here ? The one is a young lad of about sixteen, hard-working, obedient, respectable and honest, one about whom the heads of his School and College always had and have the highest opinion. The other is his sister, a blind young lady, very industrious though blind, very well educated and very well brought up, very respectable, against whom there is not so much as a breath of scandal and against whom the finger of society has never been pointed. And yet it is these two young and innocent persons who have been charged with a heinous offence. Is this all that the dark side of humanity has wrought ? No. For the accusation has been brought against these innocent hearts not by strangers, not by members of an alien community, not by foes but by their own kith and kin who have the audacity to call themselves their relatives and friends. The accusation has been brought not by males but by female members of the same race, calling themselves Zorastrian Parsis.

" The first accused has been charged with knowingly removing

from the possession of the complainants when on a visit to their quarters on the 3rd day of the current month certain valuables said to be of the aggregate value of Rs. 1,500, and with consigning them into the custody of the second accused, who has heen charged with aiding and abetting in the offence and with receiving and retaining the said stolen property.

" The complainants have failed to show in the slightest degree that the accused are anything but highly respectable. They have failed to show that there is anything in their previous conduct which could stigmatize them as disreputable or dishonest people. Besides the accused there are no less than six other families living in the same building. The accused have mixed freely with them and they with the accused. The complainants on the other hand never mixed with the accused. The complainants must be on good terms with their other tenants. They would not keep a tenant who disagreed with them and yet they have not been able to bring any of them forward to say anything against the conduct of the accused. It is true that the court found sufficient grounds to frame a charge against the accused but the court is known to do it not infrequently to give an opportunity to the accused to clear himself in a way as to leave the court unscathed and honourably. In the present case I doubt not but that Your Worship had the same intention." (The Magistrate was solemnly silent.)

Proceeding further Mr. Aga said, " it is true, Your Worship, that in cases of theft proof of previous intention to commit theft is not insisted upon as in cases of cheating or fraud. The complainants have however failed to show that the accused were so needy or so devoid of wherewithals that they must needs steal or that they were compelled to steal for the benefit of others dependent on them. Did Jal go to the complainants' house of his own accord ? Certainly not. The complainants have themselves stated that the invitation had to be pressed before he would consent to go. Admittting for the sake of argument that Jal did go into the private room, that his eye fell

on the cupboard of valuables which was unlocked and that he opened it and was tempted to steal : the question arises could the temptation be such, and was he so perverted, as to give rise to actual intention and to convert the intention into action? Supposing again for the sake of argument that Satan suddenly changed him from an innocent youth into a juvenile offender the question would arise, what was he going to do with the valuables ? Had Satan or the force of the magic of sympathy converted Thriti all at once from a highly respectable and innocent young lady into an aider and abettor ? What would have been Jal's plight if Thriti had refused to be the custodian of the stolen articles ? Would he have then gone back and restored the articles to their owners ? Would he have told the Magistrate that he had simply stolen the articles to cause mental distress or anxiety to the owners for a short while and prayed to the Magistrate to release him ? If anybody could instigate Jal to take advantage of his visit to the complainants and commit a theft it must be Thriti. But the complainants had not the temerity even to hint that she had done it. What were Jal and Thriti going to do with the stolen articles ? Were they going to pawn them ? (Laughter.) Were they going to melt them ? Was Thriti going to sell them to the Bahadurshahs or to the Meheloojis ? Was Mr. Ardeshir going to be so mean as the complainants wanted to show that he would buy his own wife's stolen articles ? Or was Thriti going to make a present of them for the benefit of wounded soldiers ? (Loud laugh.)

" The court has subjected the accused to a close and searching examination and the complainants and their pleader did their level best to disparage their character and inveigle them into admissions. They wanted to prove unfriendliness and bias. They wanted to show that they were utterly void of all sense of decorum and decency. In short, they wanted to expose them to shame and ridicule. And what has been the result ? The result is nothing more nor less than that they were exposed themselves.

They have shown that all the bias and unfriendliness was on their side. The first complainant's husband proved convincingly that she has never made him a good wife, that she has proved herself to be a cruel mother, that she has victimized one of her daughters and patted, pampered and pleased another at her expense. The complainants' own evidence has disclosed that they were on undesirably familiar terms with one who is the betrothed of the first accused and who is such a coward as to raise his hand on a young and defenceless lady. The second complainant has made no secret of the fact that she hated her father and sister so much so that she could not bear to see her own name connected with that of her father. She has made no secret of the fact that she was in league with a man who was capable of bullying and beating her sister and of writing anonymous letters to ruin others, who was capable of sending false telephone messages, who was capable of openly insulting his betrothed at a Toddy party, who was capable of borrowing loans to save himself from scrapes. If Your Worship believe the evidence of Mr. Ardeshir Dalal, Your Worship will admit that a plot was actually hatched and carried out by the complainants against the accused,—a plot as inhuman as it was cruel and merciless. What motive could the complainants have in sending Roshan to school on her birthday ? What motive had they to conceal Mr. Erach in the private apartment of a young lady all the while Jal was with them ? What motive could they have in telling the court that he was not in their house at the time ? What motive could they have in not taking Roshan to the Toddy party with them and not taking her with them on their return drive ? What motive could they have in going to the cook-room leaving Jal alone and leaving a drunken servant to watch over him ? Above all what motive had they in inviting Jal and Thriti to dine with them for the first time in their lives ?—Dine with them without the host of the day, Roshan, and in the absence of the male head of the house ? No other motive than to carry out an atrocious and deliberately laid out plot.

"Speaking of the witnesses for the complainants, I need hardly remind Your Worship of the lamentable exhibition of the long series of false statements and prevarications—I would go further and say 'perjuries' without dread of contradiction—which they made. Who is the greater sinner in that respect? Who is more fit to say the *patet pashe-i-mani ?*—the poor illiterate, hand-to-mouth-live Hindu servant, who could be easily bribed to give false evidence, or the Parsi youth who calls himself educated and well-bred but who has not shown himself as above doing a mean action in return for a much more substantial bribe in the shape of a wife.

"Speaking of the evidence of the complainants themselves, Your Worship will admit that it was all broad-fire and bombast. It was devoid of even a particle of truth. The very idea that a fair sex especially one who calls herself or claims to be a lady should so far forget her delicacy as to perjure herself in open court is simply revolting. On the other hand the evidence of the young lady Roshan stands out in most favourable and glaring contrast with that of the complainants. To say that one does not believe her evidence would only be tantamount to saying that one does not believe in God or in His goodness. If the court believe Roshan's evidence the court must believe that Sherbanoo did go into Thriti's room with the previous intention of depositing the jewels in her cupboard and entrapping her and her brother into a trap of the complainants' own making. It was a clever trap and one would wish to God that their ingenuity had been applied to a worthier cause, a cause which could have shown that weak women do not always stoop to follies.

"Now look at Huseinbi's evidence. Not to believe her evidence just because she is poor would be to believe that the world is all bad and that we are all confirmed sinners. The word of the Prophet, Koran, by which she swore, is testimony enough of the truth of her word. For to take a false oath on it means to the mind of all true followers of the Prophet damning their souls

for ever.

"Just a word about Rama's evidence. To believe that evidence would be like believing in Satan. He broke down so lamentably and was so entangled in a mesh of contradictions that he stood self-convicted.

"I now come to the crowning point of the case, which is a telling one. The complainants and their witnesses have stated that before Jal left their quarters their pious eyes had landed on the pocket of Jal's coat and that it looked swollen and puffed. They took that as a proof that the jewel-box was concealed in the pocket. In so stating they laid a trap for themselves. They averred that the coat now in possession of the court is the same that Jal wore on his visit to them. The coat was produced in court and the jewel-box did not go into the pocket. The pocket is not big enough for it. This crowning stroke must break the camel's back. Speaking of my learned friend there all I can say is, and he will pardon me for my impudence if impudence it be, that if I were he I should have thought twice before undertaking to espouse such a cause. I will not say I pity him but I would certainly say, I sympathise with him. I would be an ingrate if I did not do so as a professional brother and an honourable opponent. My learned friend has however one consolation and that lies in the fact that no counsel on the face of the earth, however eminent, could have succeeded in winning the case for the complainants. My learned friend has yet to throw his last cards. Let us hope that he will not hoist his clients with their own petards." (Vociferous laughter.)

The Advocate resumed his seat midst unchecked claps and cheers.

It was now our friend Mr. Khatkhate's turn to stand on his legs and to speechify. Poor dear Mr. Khatkhate! The last words of the Advocate had shot him to the quick, shot him in the very centre of his head and his heart and yet he could not say that the Advocate was wrong. He doubted if he had any legs to stand upon or a

little flesh of a tongue to wag. He even doubted his own existence. His wits had gone a wool-gathering. A poke in the back and a mudge in the side roused him. Turning round, his eyes landed on Superintendent Macdermott. So it was the Police-officer that had rushed to his rescue. He wiped his eyes and his nose with his *ooperna* and rose instantly but rose like one in a daze.

The Magistrate seeing the sorry plight in which he was, thought it right to prop him up with a few encouraging words.

"Well, Mr. Khat-pat-e, I mean Mr. Khat-khat-e, I hope you will now give the court the benefit of your erudition. The court is quite prepared now to hear you."

So buoyed up Mr. Khatkhate began his *khatpat* with the usual preliminary of 'Yar Worrorship'.

"I aagree with my l-l-learned friend there thiat my task is fraat with difficulties, though I can-nat aagree with him thiat if he var in my place he would nat have stood up far the complainants. My maatto is thiat Counsels should nat take a caz to be biad until it is proved in carrut thiat it is biad. If no laayer takes up a caz far the simple reason thiat it is saaposed to be biad, who will? Siarly nat a layman."

The Magistrate :—And where will lawyers go? They cannot surely fast. (Convulsive laughter.)

The learned man proceeded to say, "Yar Worrorship, though only an humble limb of His Miajesty's La-Carruts I hope I have saalved to yar satisfaction the praablem which my learned friend over there could nat." (Mr. Macdermott was here seen slyly tapping the pleader's back and pulling the end of his *ooperna*.)

"Yar Worrorship, I have lain aawake in my bed and caagitated over this question far nights. (A voice from the auditorium, 'and vat is the result'?) And I have come to the caanclusion thiat the caz is nat so biad. I hope Yar Worrorship will see the same in the end."

The Magistrate :—If you convince me.

" Vat the carrut has to see is thiat the charge braat against the aacused is true or nat. The defence has put it thiat it is faalse. The carrut will keep out of its mind al thiat the defence has urged until it has heard me. The carrut must be entirely unbiassed. If the first aacused did nat steal the moveable praperty and move it out of the possession of the complainants someone ialse must have done it. It vas not an immoveable praperty and it could nat have moved out by itself. If the aacused did nat depaazit the praperty into his sister's cupboard it could nat have gaan and depaazited itself there. Somebody ialse must have done it. So Yar Worrorship will see thiat I vas nat wraang when I said thiat I have not aaspoused a biad caz :

" Maative (motive), Yar Worrorship, is different fram intention. Iabsence of criminal intention does nat mean iabsence of maative. Maative might mean a power, a straang desire, thiat might move one at any time either far good or far biad iaction. Maative might be the creation of sudden impulse. Self-preservation is the first la of nature. Vat is there to show thiat to preserve themselves from penury which stared them in the face the aacused would not do a biad iaction ?

" Tiamptation, Yar Worrorship, in old or young, is a great thing. We al succumb to it in one shape or another at some period of our life."

The Magistrate :—And so did you, Mr. Khatkhate. Lawyers do succumb to temptation, I know, when they rehearse their witnesses.

Mr. Khatkhate's face fell a bit but he was not to be daunted now.

" Tiamptation, Yar Worrorship," he went on unruffled, " is said to be the work of Satan. It ruined our first parents. But since Gaad has nat been pleased to remove it fram our souls Gaad siarly means thiat we should succumb to it and improve."

The Magistrate :—So it is that that has improved lawyers so vastly. I hope you have already passed that stage, Mr. Khatkhate. (Roars of laughter.)

" My learned friend has tried to piant my clients as hopelessly biad. If they var so, could they have said thiat they would not have praaceeded further against the aacused but far the fiact thiat the police had caantrol of the miater? "

The Magistrate :—But they could have asked for permission to withdraw the case at a particular stage. You know, Mr. Khatkhate, that your learned friend there was kind enough to give them a hint to that effect but they would not take it.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Thiat viary fiact shows, Yar Worrorship, thiat the complainants had no doubt about the guilt of the aacused. If the complainants had withdraan the case it would have reflected against them and it would have been said thiat they had not left the carrut with clean hands.

" The iavidence on both sides, Yar Worrorship, has shown thiat far some reason the complainants and the aacused var on viary indifferent terms. Who was mar unfriendly and who vas nat, is nat the question. The question is, vas there nat biad blood between them ? The answer is, siarly there vas and plaanty of it. And vat vas the caz ? The caz, Yar Worrorship, vas the intended jaaning of hands of two pair of young people. The pair var ill-paired ; they vaanted to be unpaired and as there var difficulties the unpairing vas pastponed *sine die*. (Laughter.) The iavidence has shown caanclisively thiat the second aacused and the complainants' witness Mr. Erach did nat like each other. It has aalso shown thiat the second complainant who is betraathed to my learned friend there did nat like him and he did nat like her. I would nat insult my learned friend by aabserving thiat he has taken up the caz of the aacused far thiat reason. But I do vianture to say thiat if I var he I should certainly nat have stood far the aacused. (Loud laugh ; even the Magistrate and Mr. Aga joined.)

"Speaking of the Taady-party those who have been at such parties—Yar Worrorship must have been at them siavaral times—must have known vat its fumes impart. I will say thiat it muddles the most siansible of brains and makes even a Magistrate unfit to sit in judgment on the topers there. (Loud laugh again.) My learned friend vas there ; he says there var quaarels and insults, saards flew about in the air as it var and he could nat prevent it. I would nat say, I pity him, I would say thiat I sympathise with him. My learned friend will pardon my impudence if impudence it be." (Chuckle and titter.)

The Magistrate :—Mr. Khatkhate, I would exhort you to come to the point. You have amused the court long enough.

"Yar Worrorship, considering thiat my clients are ladies and had never faced legal brow-beating before, they stood their ground well. They did nat break down. Mr. Erach aalso did nat break down. The witness Rama gave his iavidence as such people usually do. It is so easy to frighten them. If Yar Worrorship had questioned him in yar private chiamber he would have aacquitted himself much better. These men can never be siar of details. They are easily flurried.

"Speaking of the iavidence of Huseinbi, she is aalso a servant. If you discredit Rama's iavidence why should you nat discredit her's?"

The Magistrate :—Because there are servants and servants just as there are lawyers and lawyers. (Laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—But why should nat Huseinbi have told a lie? Sarvants are aaften rebuked and have aalways old scores to clear aaff. She must be vaanting to leave the sarvice and must be on the look-out for a pretext to do so.

"I now come to the aacuseds' witnesses. Mr. Ardeshir and Miss Roshan var on notoriously biad terms with the complainants and their iavidence must therefore be taken at a discount. It vas clearly Mr. Ardeshir's duty if he thaat a plaat vas being hiatched

against the aacused to take steps to break it down. He should nat have secreted himself in the bathroom like a—to use my learned friend's words—like a coward. He should have come out of his hiding at once and tiaxed his wife and daater openly with it. If he did nat do it then he should have done it when he found thiat the plaat vas ripening. He should have separated fram his wife and elder daater if he thaat they var biad company. He should nat have waited like the piarrot in the story until his beautiful plumes var pulled out by the crows. 'Biad company,' the piarrot said, 'and sadly shook his wounded head.' (Vociferous laughter and another pull and pat by Mr. Macdermott.)

"Mr. Ardeshir accaarding to his own saying had iample reasons to be irritated against his wife and elder daater. And Yar Worrorship will admit thiat like Huseinbi he had old scores to clear up and therefore vaashed his dirty linen at the complainants' dar. (Laughter.) We have now to look to Roshanbai's iavidence. Some one seems to have taken viary good care to see thiat she vas praaperly coached. The some one must be caamplimented far it is nat easy to coach girruls. Vat is Miss Roshan's iavidence based on? It is based on mere shadows. She said she was feverish and vaanted a physic: and vat better physic far a young lady than to sit down at little love-makings and looking over picture-albums with a lovely little cousin, (huge laughter), without the knaaledge and consent of her maadher? When the cousin left her she felt lonely and by way of relaxation she indulged in looking through dar-holes into other people's privacy. She vaanted mar shadows till Jal returned. Look far the devil and he is at yar aalbow. In comes a female figure and aaff goes the worthy Miss Roshan and resumes her seat at the album. She was bold enough to peep through dar-holes and to take French leave from school but so viary feverish and aaffraid thiat she failed to aascertain who vas thiat shadow. She had not the slightest idea it was her sister. She had not the slightest idea as to vat she had

come there far. She saw a *bootti*-daated *sari* and sat thinking over the beauty of the *boottis* until Jal returned. Yar Worrorship will siarly nat believe the iavidence of a girrul who was so feverish and so frightened. There are so miany such *saris* and so miany such wearers. Yar Worrorship should nat aalso believe a girrul who preferred keeping vaach on her maadher and sister and preferred eavesdraaping to taking her tea. One would think thiat the first thing children do on their return from school is running after their tea and toast." (Laughter.)

The Magistrate :—Don't lawyers do it ? Do they run after money alone ? (Renewed laughter.)

"So much has been made, Yar Worrorship, of the jewel-box not going into the coat-paacket. I would nat pay a penny far thiat iavidence. Yar Worrorship will remember thiat my clients have said thiat so far as they remembered the coat kept in the carrut vas the same thiat Jal wore on thiat eventful day. They did not say it is the same coat. Besides vat is there to show thiat it is the same coat ? The defence has nat proved it.

"After al is said and everything is considered the naked fiact stares us in the face thiat a thiaft vas really committed at the quarters of the complainants in the forenoon of the 3rd day of the current month by some one or mar persons unknown. Al praababilities paaint at young Jal as the thief. I am viary sarry to cal him so, Yar Worrorship, and the presumption is thiat he vas. One presumption leads to another and as the stolen articles were found in Thritibai's cupboard it is further rightly presumed thiat she must be the aider and aabettor. If the carrut does nat believe these presumptions the carrut must find out the thief and the aider and aabettor. The complainants could nat have stolen their own praaperty ; it would be both ridiculous and unheard-of."

Mr. Khatkhate then sat down vastly content and with a self-satisfied air. He was pleased when his friend Mr. Macdermott whispered to him, "Bravo, Old Boy ! Well done !"

The court then rose for lunch but the spectators did not leave their seats. They stuck to them till the court re-assembled.

The Magistrate then read out his decision :—

The Decision.

" This court has a very grave and sacred duty to perform to-day. It is a duty which is both pleasant and unpleasant. I am satisfied that I am about to discharge it according to the clearest dictates of my conscience and justice.

" The issues involved in the case are somewhat intricate but the elucidation is not so difficult. The court need hardly say that it is thankful to the Counsels on both sides for the valuable help that they have given it from their own standpoints in forming its decision. I compliment them. I only wish for the sake of humanity, if not for the sake of this court, that it will not have such cases to decide in future. They are a shame to the civilized world and a shame to humanity to whom this case must prove a lesson.

" In this case the accused have been charged under section 379 of the Indian Penal Code, the first accused for theft and the second for aiding and abetting in the same. The accused have entered their written statements and said that they are not guilty. The court had, however, to frame a charge against them, not so much because of a *prima facie* case having been made out against them but because it wanted to give them an opportunity of clearing themselves of the charge in a way as to enable them to leave the court unscathed and honourably.

" The complainants are a mother and her daughter. They are members of the Parsi community and come of the renowned Zorastrian race. The accused belong to the same community and profess the same religion. The complainants and the accused are close relatives, the first complainant being the maternal aunt and the second the cousin of the accused who are brother and sister. Both the accused and the complainants are fairly well

educated. They live in the same house which belongs to the complainants. The accused had received a notice from the complainants to quit the house and would have done so ere long but for the untimely and unfortunate death of their only living parent, their mother. A little before the death of their mother the first accused had become blind. The complainants were fully aware of their distress and yet they did not abstain from dragging them to this court. Any one who calls himself a human being would think that a maternal aunt and a cousin would rather lose hundreds than drag such close and distressed relatives of theirs to a law court for a mere presumption of crime. The probability of it redounding on themselves does not seem to have occurred to them. But the court has nothing to do with such sentiments. It has only to go upon the evidence before it. From the evidence it is clear that the relations between the parties were very unfriendly. It has also been shown that the unfriendliness was all of the complainants own seeking and that the accused were forced into it.

"The complainants have said that on the 3rd day of the current month which was the birthday of the younger daughter of the senior complainant they had sent her to school. Furthermore as they wanted company and by way of proving their friendliness to the accused they invited them to share the birthday repast. It would have indeed been a fine action but for what followed. The complainants have said that it was usual for them to select and set aside early in the day such ornaments as they may have to wear in the evening. The ornaments are kept in a cupboard in one of their rooms. This room is inaccessible to all except to the complainants and a favoured servant Rama who is one of their witnesses. It was the same man that was sent to invite the accused to dine with the complainants. It was the first invitation of the kind that the accused had received from the complainants. Rama had returned with a message that the accused were sorry

they could not accept the invitation. The second complainant thereupon went to invite them personally. This is perhaps the most extraordinary point in the case. The behaviour of both the complainants in the court showed throughout that they are hot-headed and haughty and that they considered themselves to be far above the accused in social, moral and material matters. The court cannot therefore help holding that they must have some definite aim in view other than mere friendliness or courtesy in inviting the accused to dine with them for the first time in their lives.

" For evident reasons the first accused could not accept the invitation. The second was also very disinclined to do so and would not have gone but for the persuasions of his sister and a trusted old female servant. The diners were the complainants and the second accused who was said to be the only guest. The evidence has however shown it satisfactorily that there was another and a very favourite guest who for certain reasons best known to the complainants was concealed behind the scene. That second guest was the complainants' principal witness Erach Aspendiar Aga who is betrothed to the second accused. The evidence has also shown that the second complainant who is betrothed to the learned Counsel for the defence Mr. Jamshed Aga, had with the full knowledge of her mother concealed Erach in her own private apartment and kept him so concealed until after the second accused had left them. This is sworn to by one of the complainants' own servant Huseinbi. This witness appeared to the court to be a very right-minded and respectable person and the court has no reason whatever to discredit her evidence.

" The complainants have alleged that after the repast was over they had occasion to go to the kitchen. On their return to the dining room in about five minutes they found the second accused, Jal, up and ready to depart. They pressed him to stay longer but he would not. On looking at him they found one of his coat-pockets swollen and puffed. They then went into the room where

the cupboard of valuables is kept and finding it unlocked they suddenly remembered that they had forgotten to close it that morning after selecting the ornaments for the evening wear. They opened it and found that those ornaments were missing. Their suspicions were aroused and they asked the witness Rama if anybody had entered the room during their absence. That worthy is said to have informed them that Jal had entered it. That was enough, they thought to incriminate Jal. They were supported in this presumption by the witness Erach. From thence to the police-station and from there to here was the next step.

"The court entirely discredits the evidence of the complainants' witnesses. There is not so much as a particle of truth in it. As the Advocate for the accused very aptly observed, the difficulty is to say, who is the greater perjuror—the illiterate and ignorant Hindu, who could be easily bribed, or the so-called educated Parsi who hoped to get a wife for his trouble? The court thinks the latter is the greater perjuror, though both broke down lamentably. If the court wished to be hard it could punish them severely. But the court desires to be merciful. All that the court would say is that the witness Erach leaves this court most dishonourably.

"The case for the complainants was, the court thinks, to put it in the mildest terms, a stupendous piece of folly and falsehood. The most strenuous effort of their pleader could not mitigate their offence or its seriousness; for his clients were equally strenuous in thickening the chain of their falsehoods. The pleader must have now seen that he had espoused a cause which was rotten at the very roots.

"Speaking of the cause of the accused, the court must say that Mr. Advocate Aga could not have espoused a better cause. His path was beset with difficulties. The court has no hesitation in pronouncing that Mr. Aga overcame each and every one of them tactfully and sagaciously. The statements of the accused are to the court's mind quite truthful and are borne out by all that has since transpired before it. Miss Roshan

Dalal deserves every praise that any court of law in Christendom can bestow on her. Her very face and behaviour testified to the truth of her words. She did not flinch or falter in the slightest detail. It must have required a mighty effort on her part to say things against her mother and sister which would implicate them seriously. And yet the way in which she acquitted herself to vindicate the ends of truth and justice is highly commendable. Her father Mr. Ardeshir is not less worthy of praise. His evidence was equally clear and conscientious. He seems to have suffered a great deal at the hands of the complainants and yet I am glad to say that he was here not for taking revenge. I compliment him for his straightforward evidence and congratulate him on his being the father of such a daughter as Miss Roshan. The possession is invaluable and entirely makes up for all his sufferings.

" The deductions that the court draws from their evidence, from the statements of the accused and from the evidence of the complainants and their witnesses are :—

(1) That the first accused did not commit the theft :

(2) That the second accused did not aid and abet him and did not knowingly keep possession of any stolen property :

(3) That no theft was committed : and

(4) That the case was a trumped up one.

" The court therefore finds both the charges to be entirely false and groundless and acquits the accused who leave this court quite unscathed and most honourably." (Uncontrollable applause, some hurrahs and a great deal of waving of handkerchiefs : silence was enforced.)

" The court therefore directs that each of the complainants pay to each of the accused the maximum fine provided by the law for frivolous and vexatious accusations. The court regrets its inability to inflict a heavier penalty. The accused have how-

ever the option to prosecute the complainants for perjury and they have the court's permission to exercise it.

" In the absence of the complainants I direct their pleader to pay the fine. I also order the Police to restore the valuables to the complainants."

Mr. Aga said that he thanked His Worship heartily on his own behalf and on behalf of his clients for the very patient hearing and the close attention which he had paid to the case. He was pleased to say that his clients had decided to pay the whole amount of the fine to the Women's War Relief Fund. His clients were not revengeful and he was very glad to say that they had further decided not to prosecute the complainants for perjury.

The court-room was filled with acclamation. Friends and acquaintances vied with one another to congratulate the victors and their witnesses. There was unprecedented joy and tumult, such as is rarely witnessed in a law court. When, lo ! news reached the court and spread like wildfire that the second complainant Sherbanoo was no more. It struck terror into every heart.

Jamshed Aga, Roshan and Ardeshir, Thriti and Jal, Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji and the Bahadurshahs did not wait to enquire by whom the news was brought and if it was correct but rushed out and motored away to Meher Villa. When they reached there they found that Shera was still alive, and Jamshed Aga had the good fortune to look on her though for the last time on this earth.

In the court-room where, but a minute before all was joy and no sorrow, there, solemn silence now prevailed. Even the Magistrate was greatly moved. Not a man but felt that nature had vindicated itself, vindicated itself in such a way as to be a lasting lesson to the listeners of the news. Christians crossed themselves devoutly and murmured, ' Lord, Thy will be done ! ', Mahomedans muttered, ' Allah, Allah ! *Towbah* ! *Towbah* ! ', Hindus slapped their cheeks and said, ' Ram ! Ram ! ', Parsis bowed down their

heads in mute awe. They all felt that the hand of God was in it. They prayed devoutly that the lost daughter's living mother would benefit by the lesson and live a better life.

If a painter were present he would have transferred the scene to his canvas. If a photographer were present he would have immediately set up his camera. If Homer had come to life again he would have sung,

"Declare, O Muse, in what ill-fated hour
Sprung the fierce strife, from what offended power.
The unmotherly mother the ties of wedlock defied
And for the mother's offence the daughter died."

CHAPTER XLII

MOTIDANA AND HER MUJRA

" Come listen, O passer-by,
As you are now so once was I :
As I am now so you shall be :
Prepare yourself to follow me."

IT is my business, reader, to lead and yours to follow. Leaving the court and the Parsis behind, I wish you to follow me to the house of a Mahomedan in 'Mahomedan *Mohla*.' Far be it from me to take you to a disreputable locality. 'Mahomedan *Mohla*' is mostly inhabited by the respectable middle class of Mahomedans. In that street, standing out somewhat prominently, was the house of the well-known singer Motidana. It was a modest-looking house without any pretensions to architecture. Anyone, however, looking at the exterior could say that it was a Mahomedan house and that the owner, whoever he was, had taken good care to see that the exterior should vie very favourably with the masonry compatriots that ran in irregular rows alongside and opposite.

Motidana was a very decent person. She liked to have a clean abode and clean surroundings. Her own apartments were on the second storey. They were pretty spacious, especially the *Jalsa* or concert room which opened on to the street. What has a *kanchani* to do with concerts, I imagine the curious reader inquiring. Is not a *kanchani* a paid singer, who gladdens people's hearts on occasions of marriage and other festivities ? She is so and something more to boot. She is as important a personage within as without her own house. She is as much sought after and run after at home as abroad. Flattery follows her wherever she may be. The *kanchani* holds a concert or a musical entertainment once or

twice a week at her own house. The most important of these is the *Mujra*. Whereas in a concert two or more singers can take part, in a *mujra* the *prima donna* or the owner of the house is singer and dancer combined. The *mujra* usually follows the concert. It comes off in the quiet of midnight and continues till about four o'clock in the morning when the guests disperse. And who are the guests ? They are mostly the go-ahead, devil-may-care, reckless men-about-town ; the heir-apparents of rich parents ; the busy-doing-nothings and the busy-doing-somethings ; the cream and the curd of society,—mostly Mahomedans and Hindus and in the case of a well-known singer a few Parsis. In the *mujra* the *prima donna* is at her best. The quiet of midnight in a congested *mohla* is equally favourable for music as for merciless deeds. With the finest of music going on in one place, the vilest of miscreancies may be in operation in another. It is in the order of things as they happen in the name of civilisation. It is like seeing marriage and funeral side by side in one street, even in one house.

Motidana made it a point to see that peace and order prevailed at her *jalsas* and *mujras*. But even she was not always successful. Envy and jealousy did find their way into her house as in those of other *kanchanis*. The seekers of her favour were not a few. They vied with one another for supremacy ; especially the Mahomedans, Kamalkhan, Yarkhan, Tore-i-bajkhan, Meherali, Sultanali and Moradali ; the Hindus, Rangnath, Sunderrao, Morarirao and Khanderao and the Parsis, Dorabshaw, Cowasshaw and a few others among whom was our favourite Rustom. Rustom was the target of all the *tannajanni* or taunts, all the envy and all the wrath of his rivals for he was the one towards whom Motidana always turned for approbation and applause.

Unlike most names Motidana has a meaning and a very good meaning too : grains of pearls. And really the music that flowed from her lips fell like a string of pearls. Her songs were choice and well selected. She never wasted either her songs or her words. They were always to the purpose. On that particular night of

which I am now writing she was if anything more reserved. Her look seemed to say, look ye, ye may be great at your own homes but I will tolerate none of your nonsense here ; keep at a safe distance from me if ye guard your honour of which, I trow, you have but little to boast of.

At about ten o'clock the self-invited guests of the day began to come in and by about ten-thirty the room was crowded. The concert was executed by two other female singers besides Motidana. In addition to Motidana's husband and the *tabalchi*, there was an extra *sarangiwalla* and an extra *tabalchi*. At 11-30 the concert was concluded and the two friendly singers rose to leave with their pockets pretty full. The interval between that and the *mujra* time was the interlude during which *tabucks* or small trays of *pan* and *supari* were handed round along with iced lemonade, soda, tea and coffee and *sherbet*. Remarks, alike gay, sprightly and flighty, jests and taunts, flew about freely. Wordy blows were given and received pretty vigorously. It was not uncommon to see a Hindu siding with a Mahomedan, a Mahomedan with a Hindu and occasionally a Parsi with either of the two. A Zorastrian would not be a Zorastrian if he did not run to the relief of the oppressed. It is one of the tenets of his faith.

Motidana, quiet, composed and imposing, though evidently busy with her own thoughts and the *pan-supari*, had her eyes here, there and everywhere. She thought it right on such occasions to be neutral and reserved. 'Brother Tore-i-bajkhan, your pardon, but you are mistaken.' 'Brother Rustom, you should not be angry ; the world is such, so let it be—take it for what it is worth and all will be well.' 'Brother Yarkhan, remember what the Prophet has said : Revenge redounds on him who takes it ; praise be to the Prophet : his word is law.' This was the way she went on pacifying and purifying here and there. This was the way she went on until the regulator struck the hour of twelve when all were alert and the *mujra* began.

You will turn up your nose, you men of the West, whose eyes may run through these pages. Pshaw ! I hear you say, is there anything like music in the East ? Do they really know how to sing or how to dance ? Have they the voice, have they the ear, have they the grace ? you ask. I say, yes. We have all this and more. We have a musical science of our own. Times were when the Parsis like yourselves did not know it but like themselves they were curious and keen and they do know it now. They have taken to Indian music now as familiarly as Hindus and Mahomedans. To an untrained and unfamiliar Indian ear Western music is as odious as Indian music to the untrained and unfamiliar ear of the men of the West. The beauty the Indian fails to see in the one the European fails to see in the other. Both are to blame. Both ought to try and know each other. Speaking of Indians, the Parsis are an exception. They have taken as familiarly to English music as to Indian music, aye, even more. The piano and the violin, the accordion and the organ are with many of us and we are quite at home with them. The Indian *sarangi* and the *sitar* vie with the violin and the mandolin and yet the men of the West know nothing of them. We have proved to you on common platform how grand an effect can be produced by the conglomeration and combination of Hindi and European music. We have toned many a song of ours to the tune of your music. Have you ever essayed to set any of yours to the tune of ours ? No ; because you are too proud and too vain to do it. Music is an art and art is no man's own property. You have as much a right to ours as we have to yours. A word before we let aside this. Indian music is charged with absence of harmony and want of martial music. Distinguished artists have proved that charge number one is incorrect. Charge number two is quite correct and incontrovertible. What the Indian music lack in this direction is made up by the grace and beauty of their variegated dances which are executed in different poses and different ways all as clever as artistic. They

have a charm of their own.

The *mujra* now commenced.

Motidana rose to her feet and pronounced the words '*Subhan-Allah*,' Praise be to God. Great and Good is God. In His name we begin. According to custom, she had a white bandage put on her eyes. This was a signal for those present to get up and change their positions. The singer had to select a cap. She began at a certain point and took three distinct rounds amongst the circle of visitors. During the last round she stopped at a particular place and she put her right hand over a man's head. That man was Rustom. Without knowing who it was she removed the jaunty little cap from his head and put it on hers. The same minute she walked back to her place. The visitors could not doubt the efficacy of the bandage over her eyes. The selection was quite impartial. It was considered to be an unique honour and Rustom was its lucky recipient. There were low howls and suppressed growls. The singer seemed not to notice them for they were not unusual. She was not displeased that Rustom was the lucky recipient. She was a good woman, though a singer, loyal to the man she had married in the sight of God. Besides had not Rustom done him and her many a good turn? Did he not suffer for that at the hands of those who affected to admire her?

The next moment she let loose the plentiful knot of her long raven hair which flowed down her back almost to her knees. She was proud of it and took care to preserve it. Some of it glided over her face and made the beauty of her face more beauteous. There was applause and murmur of approbation.

When Motidana began there was a dead silence. The very first song captured the audience. They listened in breathless silence, the *sarangiwalla* and the *tabalchi* playing away with might and main.

"I sing and you sigh;
I dance and you're doomed;
I laugh and you long;

I spit and you swallow ;
I bend and you bow ;
I rise and you rave ;
I dream and you're dreaming;
I wake and you're awake ;
I bait and you take ;
For all this is your fate,
And that you must face."

There were encore and uproar and cries of "once more— repeat ; yes, by all that is holy, repeat" which were soon drowned for Motidana stood firm as a rock. It was not her wont to repeat songs except only one or two of them at the conclusion of the *mujra* for frequent repetition meant certain death. There was a call then for a *bansli* dance. Lots were cast as usual amongst the audience for the presentation of a silk handkerchief to the singer for the purpose. As good or bad luck would have it, it was Rustom that won again. He produced from his pocket a rich silk handkerchief, went up to the *prima donna*, bent his knee and offered the kerchief to her, which she took with a slight bend and a bow. There was gnashing of teeth and some clenching of fists from Tore-i-bajkhan, Yarkhan aud certain others. But they could say nothing for it was all above board. The singer folded up the handkerchief in the shape of a *bansli* or flute, accommodated one end of it between her teeth and held the other between the tapering fingers of her left hand, the glittering bangles on which and her red-coloured nails made a graceful contrast with the cream-laid kerchief. The *sarangiwalla* played the snake dance music with accompaniment of *bansli* and the dancer danced. The silver *Zanzris* [1] round her legs made a harmonious clink. The fingers of her right hand went up and down the kerchief playfully. It seemed as if the kerchief was 'banslified'. The dance over, there were other songs. It was a little past three when the crowning song of the night began. Moti-

[1] Strings of small tinkling bells worn round the ankles.

dana put her soul into it and held the audience enthralled. It seemed as if it was her last song, in which Heaven was determined to help her. It seemed as if the angels wanted her to sing on their stage. They were all athirst for the heavenly singer had kept them waiting too long.

SONG.

" On that beautiful morn I rise,
And prepare for the parting strife ;
It is my Lover I am going to see,
In silk and satin panoply—
The Lover who has always been
And will be a Lover unto me
In eternal bonds of peace and unity.

Light of my heart, look away from me not ;
For it is to Thee that I fly
In the fulness of love and pride.
Weep, O Motidana, weep,
Weep tears of joy and delight ;
For is it not to Him thou art going,
Him who is all goodness and light ?

Weep not for me, O friends, if friends you be ;
Weep only for my sins and wipe them away ;
The Prophet is great and will hold eternal sway.
Farewell, friends, farewell, until
From my place in high I shower on you
Blessings bright."

The singer was affected no less than the listeners ; affected as she never was before. She wept and those round her wept too. The sojourn of singers divine they say is short. They appear on the purview of our horizon, twinkle brightly for a time and disappear like stars. True to her name, Motidana had strewn pearls and

woven strings of them for her admirers. She was now going, she thought, to Pearldom. Neither the singer nor the audience were in a mood for more songs. Some kind of awe had overtaken them. They rose, laid offerings of gold and silver coins according to wont in the silver tray that lay at Motidana's feet. Envy and jealousy seemed to enwrap them no more. Low *salaams* and bows in right oriental fashion followed and they made their exit. Rustom alone loitered behind. Motidana, unseen by others, had made a sign to him to stay. When all were gone, she asked the *tabalchi* to go down the stairs and lock the door after them.

When they were alone they could say nothing for some little time. The *sarangiwalla* and the *tabalchi* stood there in mute and respectful silence. Motidana at last spoke :

"Rustomji Sheth, *salaam*." She held out her hand which Rustom took mechanically. She then continued, "Rusi Sheth, I don't know what has come over me to-day. It is something which I can divine but cannot define. Methinks Allah wants me in the place we have all to go to, some earlier, some later. Though an alien, you have been, Shethji, to us, I mean to this humble servant of yours, and to that husband and that friend of mine there, true as ever a kinsman was. You cared not for those cankers ; you cared not for what the world and your people would say ; you helped us when help was most wanted. May Allah and the Prophet, on whom be praise, reward you for it. All I can do will be to pray for you and shower blessings on you from my place in the high. I am a frail mortal and have no right to advise you ; and yet I must warn you, Rustom Sheth, not to make friends with any singer or visit any of their haunts after I am gone. All our class is not good. It is but few that can withstand its sins and temptations. There are hundreds bad ; and only one or two good. A word more of warning, Mr. Rustom, with your permission. I see that your community runs after everything that is English. They have taken to dancing and tableaux and not the least to race-betting. Your ladies espe-

cially are mad over these. Dancing plain and simple means ' Nautch ' but English ' Nautch ' is worse than ours. Our ladies do not dance arm in arm and breast to breast with males, aye strangers. For a girl in sweet sixteen, however highly placed, the first step in dancing composition is to throw herself practically into the arms of a stranger. The music, the wine, the whirling round and round with a tight corset or a tighter shoe and the consequent giddiness complete what the touch and contact may have left uneffected. A married man allows his wife to dance with his friend or foe simply because of the pleasure of dancing with that friend or foe's wife. It's an ill wind, Rusi, that blows nobody any good. That ill wind is now blowing amongst your people in all its fury. It's blowing in the clubs and gymkhanas, in pavilions and palaces and at conversazione and concerts. This beautiful city boasts of being the pioneer of this as of many other family-breaking mischiefs. Its example will, of course, be followed by your clubs and gymkhanas in other parts. I am told, Rusi Seth, that one of your oldest English-teaching girls' schools is at the bottom of this mischief. The promoters thought that dancing is a *sine qua non* for completing a young lady's accomplishments. The dancing teacher, an English girl of course, wanted to improve her prospects and what did she do ? She left the school only to open a dancing class on a larger scale. I am told that the eyes of the organizers were then opened and they raised the danger signal before the eyes of Parsi parents in one of their annual reports. Was it not like closing the door of the stable after the horse had run away ? The Parsi press was wonderfully silent over it. English vices unlike English virtues are catching and contagious. It is not the children but the parents and guardians that are to blame. Take my word for it, Mr. Rustom, your community will rue the day when they succumb to this society canker. Where is the husband that is more happy than he who can feel that his wife has never touched any flesh but his own ? Who more happy than the wife who can feel that her husband has

never been tender to any other woman but she? In tableaux your girls ripening into maturity are forced to tort and twist their shapely limbs into all sorts of unnatural poses and contortions. It's most unseemly and unladylike.

"As with dancing so with racing your males first and then your females are going to rack and ruin with it.

"Those on the verge of the grave can prophesy. I prophesy, Rustomji Sheth, that you are destined to be great. Resolve to be great as you are good; for one must work for glory. It does not come unasked or unsought. Work is worth and worth is work. When great, continue to be kind to this husband and that adopted brother of mine. See, I place their hands in yours. Brother Rustom, come, lock your hands in mine once and for ever by way of final parting and promise."

The three males present wept like females. Rustom at last managed to speak.

"Motidana, I swear by this *kushti* and *sudreh* of mine and promise that I will do your bidding. But—but—Motidana, you surely don't mean to say that—"

"Yes, Rusi, I surely mean to say that I shall be a denizen of this world no more. I am going to be gathered to His great mercy. I have left you a little, a very little, in my will. Give it away in charity, if you like, but do not refuse to accept it. It will help you on the onward path to glory which you should now steadily begin to tread if you want to be a true follower of your Prophet. Methinks there will be some trouble for you after I am gone. Your enemies are intent on your ruin. This photo and the inscription on its back will be your salvation. Preserve it, if not for ever, until such time as it has discharged its function. It will save your reputation and level all calumny."

The following was written in Urdu at the back of the photo. The handwriting was Motidana's own, neat, bold and full. The letters appeared like *moti danas*, pearl gems :

"I present this photo on the eve of my departure to heaven to our friend and helper, Rustom Delaver, as an humble token of the ungrudging help and advice which he always gave us. It was real *del-avrie*.[1] A dying person does not tell an untruth. He was very dear to us as a friend. Vile and abominable tongues ascribed motives to his goodness. But he is pure and never transgressed the limits of pure friendship. Let the foul tongue of calumny cease and touch him no more except on pain of eternal penalty.—*Motidana*."

Tears rose to Rustom's eyes. He could not suppress his feelings and he gave free vent to them.

"O, Motidana, you talk like one in a dream. Surely you do not mean to desert us. Death does not betake one for the mere asking. What shall I do without your instructions? What will become of my singing? Who will complete my lessons? Motidana, you say you have left me a gift. I don't deserve it for the little that I gave you, you always forced back on me at the proper time like a true friend in need. However, I promise that I will do your bidding. If I spend your money it will be well spent."

There was another and a somewhat long silence. The moment for parting had come and there must be a farewell. It was at last bidden.

"*Salaam*, Motidana, *salaam*. I shall call early to-morrow and hope to see your spirits revived and you hale and hearty."

"Rustomji Sheth," said the *sarangiwalla*, "it is so late. Where will you go now? If it be not too much trouble for you, you can sleep here. I shall lay myself down by your side on the ground."

Motidana said nothing but the *tabalchi* pressed the invitation and Rustom consented. The *salaams* were repeated, Motidana saying, "God be your protector, farewell." She rose gently and

[1] Bravery.

as gently and slowly withdrew to her room. Rustom followed the *sarangiwalla* and entered one of the back rooms at the end, removed his boots and threw himself on a bedstead in a corner without taking off his dress. He was too bewildered and too far confused to think of doing anything else. The *sarangiwalla* made a *pathari* [1] by his side and begged of Rustom to excuse him for a few minutes. He was an old man he said, life was so uncertain and he always made it a point to make ablutions and to say a short prayer before going to bed. Rustom nodded assent and was soon alone in the room.

[1] Bed made on the ground.

CHAPTER XLIII

RUSTOM ON THE RUGGED ROAD

" *Life is a waste of wearisome hours,*
Which seldom the rose of enjoyment adorns;
And the heart that is soonest awake to the flowers
Is always the first to be touch'd by the thorns,"

MOORE'S *Irish Melodies.*

RUSTOM rose and walked up and down with his hands folded on his breast and his head bent low. His thoughts ran riot within him. It was the first time he had stayed to sleep at that house. There were moments when he felt that he would put on his boots again and fly from the house. But something, something unfathomable held him spell-bound to the spot. He was not superstitious but he felt sure something serious was about to happen and that he was soon to be engulfed in trouble. He racked his brains and racked them in vain. He could not fathom either the nature or the extent of the impending evil. How long he might have continued in this reverie we cannot say. He was at it for about half an hour when the *sarangiwalla* returned. This roused him and he lay prostrate on the bed again.

Rustom tried to go to sleep but that soft nurse of nature was obdurate and refused to engulf him in her sweet embrace. He could only think and go on thinking as before. The *sarangiwalla* appeared to sleep but his sleep was unsound. He occasionally muttered something that sounded harsh and incoherent. Rustom could comprehend only a few words here and a few words there :— " That is impossible. I will not do it. It is absurd. Aye, it is a sin. God save me from it."

It was five-thirty in the morning but still dark. The *sarangi-walla* was buried in deep lethargy under the influence of opium to which he was not a stranger. But for this it is doubtful if his plight had not been the same as Rustom's. Rustom's impatience was increasing. His brains were on fire. He felt hot all over. He could restrain himself no more. Motidana had told him she was an early riser and early risers do not rise late even when they go late to bed. He must go and find out for himself if Motidana were alive. He put on his boots and unlatched the door. This door opened on to a long and narrow corridor leading to the *mujra*-room which as the reader will remember looked on to the street. Motidana's room adjoined the *mujra*-room. Traversing the corridor, Rustom came to it. The door was wide open. A glance told him that Motidana was not there. He rushed into the *mujra*-room. The front windows were all open. He made for one of the windows to see if Motidana had thrown herself out of it, when his foot came into contact with something heavy that lay on the floor. It was so heavy and he was in such haste that he fell flat over it. He raised himself quickly, holding by the rail of an old-fashioned iron rocking chair, and oh, what was it that he beheld? There was Motidana lying face downwards and at full length on the ground. She was still in *mujra*-dress, the same that she had worn that night. Her long and flowing hair was dishevelled. Some of it was besmeared in blood. A sort of faintness came over Rustom. The sight was a torture. He closed his eyes with his right hand to escape it. Had he not done so he would have noticed that there was a shining knife sticking in Motidana's back. He would have fallen but at that moment there were loud and piercing cries, cries of murder, murder, police, police. Rustom opened his eyes and saw an old crone standing by him, wringing her hands and beating her breast. It was Motidana's servant Murtuja. Cries like these are soon taken up and travel like wild-

fire. It is as unaccountable as true. In a moment the whole house was in an uproar. If Rustom had looked out he would have seen that large crowds had formed in the street and were still thronging there. Murder ! Murder ! Police, Police ! was all that could be heard. Doors and windows were thrown open as if by magic and were soon replete with living heads and humanity. It seemed as if the ethereal abodes had hurled down their superfluous burdens. It was a telling sight, so sudden and therefore so surprising, so ominous and therefore so awe-inspiring. It is scenes like this that at once appeal and allure. The teeming masses that filled the doors and windows, nooks and corners, and towered high above the roofs and terraces, were shabby, dishevelled and semi-dressed. Their countenances were weird and withered. They had not yet slept off the fumes of Morpheus.

Rustom's first impulse was to run away. But something kept him transfixed to the spot. A minute more and the *mujra*-room was packed like sardine. The street crowd had rushed in. There were cries of '*pukroe*,' '*pukroe*,' (seize him, seize him), he is the murderer, don't let him escape. Rustom thought many of the voices were familiar to him. But just then he could not recognize them.

It being a Mahomedan locality there were police *pahras* or watches at both ends of the street. The Pydhonie Police Station was not far off. Telephones were soon in operation and the cries of murder, murder, soon gave way to those of ' move aside, move aside, make way for the white police.' The police peons who raise these cries know how to use their hands and bludgeons as well as their tongues. The stunted staffs of authority were simultaneously at work ; a poke here and a poke there, nasty nudging and crafty elbowing. The motley crowd could not resist this unceremonious process which continued until the white police had reached the door of the *mujra*-room and were actually in it. There were a Superintendent and a constable, two detectives, a Jamadar, a Naik

and four or five *pili-pughriwallas*. At the sight of the police, four men rushed forward, two Mahomedans and two Hindus. The Mahomedans were Tore-i-bajkhan and Yarkhan, the Hindus were Balvantrao and Rangnath. Tore-i-bajkhan took the lead.

"Superintendent, sir, apprehend that Parsi. He is the murderer."

Rustom tried to speak. But his articulating organs refused to move. What he could not do for himself was done by others. Two of these were Parsis. They were Rustom's chums, Dorabshaw and Cowasshaw.

"Who says so? Who saw it?" they exclaimed.

"We say it; we have seen it." This was said almost in one breath by the self-same four men who had laid the accusation against Rustom.

The challengers were for replying but the police put them down. Superintendent Anderson and Constable Underwood looked at Rustom. There were spots of blood onhis clothes. He was bareheaded. This was enough to rouse suspicion.

"Mr. Rustom," said Mr. Anderson in an undertone, "we are sorry to see you in this plight—immensely sorry for we have known you long. Your guilt appears to be on your dress. We won't ask you now to say if you are guilty or not. Time enough for that. But we would advise you to be quiet and to obey orders if you don't want us to be unpleasant."

Rustom nodded assent.

The Superintendent then ordered the *mujra*-room to be cleared of all except the accusers and the accused. Motidana's servant Murtuja, who asserted that she was an eye-witness, was allowed to be there also. The room being thus cleared the police were about to commence the preliminary investigations, when the Deputy Commissioner of Police was announced. He looked from the one to the other, the alive to the dead and from the dead to the alive, as if quietly taking in the whole situation. He then walked

from one end of the room to the other, followed by the white police and the detectives, the black standing behind at a respectable distance. He then came up to Rustom and stood staring at him for a minute. Innocent as he was, Rustom boldly and steadily met his gaze. His measure having thus been taken, the Deputy Commissioner turned to the accusers and tried to look into their eyes, which immediately dropped.

"Old birds?" inquired the Deputy of the Superintendent in an undertone.

"Yes, all."

"Been inside how many times? Hard or simple?"

"Two of them once, two twice, hard; old associates, always under eye," answered the Superintendent.

"And that scarecrow of the woman there?" asked the Deputy.

"Nothing known yet about her. But we will soon find it out."

The Deputy Commissioner smiled, rubbed his hands knowingly and exchanged satisfied glances with the Superintendent. They then approached the dead and the preliminary investigations began. A Cawnpori carpet covered the full breadth of the room. Motidana's person lay over it, face forward and the head touching the iron chair. There was a deep wound in the left side of the forehead, which appeared to have been caused by contact with some hard substance during a sudden fall. There was a pool of blood on the left side of the body, the side on which the wound was. Some of Motidana's long-flowing hair was submerged in it, as also part of her dress on that side. The blood looked black but it was not yet quite dry. There were the hands and the legs, outstretched, stiff and stark. Above all there was the knife, sharp, piercing and new, which was rooted down deep on the right side above the waist. There was very little blood, if any at all, on the apparel on that side where the knife had penetrated; and none on the carpet on that side. This was an occasion for

the superior police to exchange glances with one another once more. There were no other marks of injury and no ornaments on the body, though the girl was still in *mujra* dress. Besides two or three letters and a few silver coins nothing else was found in her pockets. The police took charge of these. A rich velvet Mogul cap, evidently a man's, and a big silk handkerchief, also a man's, were found in the blood pool. The handkerchief bore the initials R. D. which were worked into it in red thread. The inside of the cap disclosed a light and showy brass rim with the words Rustom Delaver imprinted on it.

The police officers then rose to their feet and began another search. The room was carefully circumnavigated. The detectives and the police peons went down flat on the ground and looked out for any little thing that could be discovered. There were two or three cupboards and tables with drawers, which were carefully ransacked. But nothing was found except some marks of footsteps on the carpet. The police cut out these. The carpet was then slowly rolled up, the body being carefully lifted up and placed on a sofa. When the carpet was half rolled Detective Mahomedkhan, who was kneeling and helping to roll it, started, so much so that he almost fell back. His eyes twinkled and rolled and looked intently at something white that was crumpled up and concealed underneath. It was on the side near one of the walls as far as the hands could reach. It was light and white. The Deputy Commissioner ordered a police peon to take up the thing and unfold it. There were two long muslin *peherans*, such as are worn by Mahomedans. They were soft and moist with blood. There were also two big black-coloured cotton handkerchiefs, such as are used by Mahomedans and low-class Indians. Spots of blood and snuff stood on them. The police took charge of all these. The eyes of the police officers travelled to the accusers. They were standing pale and trembling. The rolling-up was then proceeded with until it was finished. But nothing else was discovered. The police then

turned to the windows and looked out into the street and over the parapet. They then approached the door and went down the stairs to the outer gate. The stairs showed footprints of bare feet and heavy *jodas*. The police compared them with those on the cut-out portions of the carpet and took notes of the same. The footprints continued upto the outer gate and then disappeared. The rest of the house was then overhauled but nothing of importance was found, except the *sarangiwalla* who was still asleep and snoring loudly in his *pathari*. They shook him and he opened his eyes drowsily.

"Where am I, O Allah, where am I?" he murmered. "Am I dreaming or am I awake? Sure enough, the room is the same but why am I lying on the ground?"

Mr. Anderson took him by the hand and forced him to rise.

"Now tell us, my man, why you lay yourself down on the ground when this bed is by," asked he in Urdu, with which he was quite at home.

"Yes, yes, I remember," said the man so addressed. "I remember it now. Alas for me! Remember it all but too vividly. I did not use this bed for Rustomji Sheth had to sleep in it."

"But how have you been sleeping so long?" inquired the Deputy. "Did you not hear the noise, the uproar? Did you not hear of the murder?"

"Murder?" vociferated the man. "Whose murder?"

"The murder of Motidana," said the Commissioner.

If anything was wanted to lift the man out of his lethargy it was this. He wailed and whimpered, whimpered and wailed and beat his breast like a woman until the police stopped him.

"Then you know nothing of the murder?"

The man hesitated and looked dubious. At last he replied.

"No; I did not know it was committed," said he.

"But you knew it was about to be committed?"

"No."

"Then you knew about something else? Probably about an

intended robbery or an assault?"

"Allah, Allah! I wish I was not drugged. I wish I had not taken the *ganja* they gave me. But I am on oath; by Allah, I am on oath; I must not and will not tell it."

"Well, my man, we will not force you to do it now. But a murder has been committed. We want information from you and you will have to go with us to the Police Station."

"But by whom has the murder been committed? Who are the witnesses and the accusers?" inquired the *sarangiwalla*.

"We cannot tell you that now. We will do that when you break your oath, which you are not bound to keep now, and tell us all that you have sworn to keep secret. It's your wife that has been killed and for her sake you must make a clean breast of it."

"*Tobah*! *Tobah*! Avaunt! Avaunt!"; said the man. "I wish I were killed instead. Kill me now, O Sir, for mercy's sake, and be done with a sinner."

"The court will do that if you don't tell the truth. They will brand you or hang you."

The party then returned to the *mujra*-room. The dead body was placed on a stretcher and conveyed to the morgue in Kamatipura. The police had orders not to touch or remove the knife but to let it remain until the Police Surgeon had examined the body.

Mr. Anderson then informed Rustom that as he was charged with murder he must be detained in custody. His clothes were then searched. There were a small penknife, a money purse and a cotton handkerchief in one pocket; there was a water silk *topee* or cap in another. Rustom had forgotten all about this *topee*. As he was bareheaded he asked permission to put it on, which was accorded. The police continued the search and found nothing more. They asked Rustom if he had concealed anything. Rustom hesitated but only for a moment. He dipped his hand down the *sudreh* and brought out something which looked like a card. It was Moti-

dana's photo.

" O, Sir," he begged, " you will not force it from me. This photo will be the saving of me, I trow."

The Superintendent took the photo and showed it to the Deputy. They read it and conversed in an undertone.

" Mr. Rustom," said the Deputy, " we must keep the photo. But we will give it to your man of law if he wants it. You must now go with the Superintendent. We will not handcuff you for we feel sure you will not try to escape. As we don't want you to kill yourself we will take charge of this little penknife, this handkerchief and this purse. If you are innocent don't do anything rash ; for instance don't strike your head against the wall. For innocence is sure to be saved. I knew your father. I know the Meheloojis and I have known you long enough. I cannot therefore help advising you."

Mr. Anderson then led Rustom out and put him in police van in which three of the policemen were already sitting. Mr. Underwood got in after them and the van drove off. What must be Rustom's condition and the state of his mind ? They were anything but enviable.

It has been rightly observed that life differs from the play only in this :—it has no plot. All is vague, desultory, unconnected till the curtain drops with the mystery unsolved.

Life is a comedy to him who thinks and a tragedy to him who feels. Life is a festival only to the wise. Seen from the nook and chimney-side of prudence, it wears a rugged and dangerous front.

CHAPTER XLIV

HER BIRTH AND HER WORTH

" *The whole world, without art and dress,*
Would be but one great wilderness,
And mankind but a savage herd,
For all that nature has conferr'd."

BUTLER'S *The Lady's Answer to Hudibras.*

IT is said that ill news comes apace. It is further said that it has wings and with the wind doth go. So it was in this case. The news of Motidana's death did travel apace. Though a singer she was not unknown to name and fame. Rough men and rude men, wise men and wiseacres, idle men and industrious, carried the news from mouth to mouth until it was sown broadcast. Newspapers and news-mongers were not slow to follow. Like birds of prey they are always perching aloft. The evening newspapers dressed up for the masquerade and were out earlier than usual that day. The headings were as big as they were boisterous. They loomed large over leading lore. They played to the taste of the populace. 'The Murder of Motidana ; Monstrous Murder in Mahomedan *Mohla* ; Death of the Famous Singer ; Mysterious Demise of a Mahomedan Dancer ; Arrest of Mr. Rustom Delaver ; Coroner's Inquest ; The Prisoner before the Magistrate ; Overwhelming Evidence against the Accused ; Serious Loss to the Singing World ; Parsis, look up, if you don't desire to be down ; What are they coming to ?' The accounts of the murder were not less variegated or less varnished. Some said Rustom was caught red-handed ; some gave description of a serious struggle between him and his victim. Some went on to say that Motidana was alive,

when the police arrived, and that she pointed to Rustom as her murderer. One of the papers, which had decried against and laid its pen-foot heavily on singers and dancers and warned their patrons against the viles of these sirens, was the loudest in Motidana's praise and lifted her up to the ninth sky before the eyes of the reading public. Some of them gave photos of Motidana which were taken during different periods of her upward progress. The press is but a huge masquerade and he whose wisdom is to pay it court, masks his own unpopular penetration and seems to think its severe meanings real. This is but too true in the case of the Parsi community and of their newspapers. The law lays down that no man shall be adjudged a culprit until he is proved to be so. Some of the orthodox Parsi papers who are notorious for neglecting even truth, justice and law, defied the law and described Rustom as a human horror. They pointed their pen of denunciation at the reform party and its papers, said they were at the root of all evil and that but for their cursed progress the community would not have come to that sad pass.

Motidana, though no more, was the woman of the moment. After a good deal of rigmarole there came a description of Motidana's birth, parentage and professional career. Whilst in life, she was reviled ; whilst in death, she was sanctified. She was the daughter of an Englishman, a Colonel in the Indian Cavalry. The Colonel was a bachelor and was alike popular with his own people and the public. He was fond of Indian music and had fallen in love with a famous singer. He married her according to Mahomedan rites ; for Mahaboob [1] which was the name of the singer, would not yield to his persuasions otherwise. There was a *nikah*, [2] which did not however bind them for ever. The Colonel could have given a

[1] Mahaboob though a name, has also a meaning. It means sweetheart.

[2] A marriage according to Mahomedan rites performed by a *Kazi* or Mahomedan priest.

talak [1] to his wife, as their marriage was performed according to Mahomedan rites. In this he would have acted as so many educated Mahomedans have done in the case of their innocent English wives under the very nose of Englishmen at their home and hearth. The Colonel was, however, too honourable to do that; and to do justice to Mahaboob, she never gave cause for it. Motidana was the offspring of that union. Upto the age of twelve, she attended a Mission School in the Punjab. She could speak and write English well enough though her Mahomedan mother had drawn her mind and energies more towards Urdu and Arabic, which formed her principal study. The Colonel was for baptizing her and for taking her to England but the mother opposed. For some time the girl belonged to no religion. When she was only twelve, the Colonel had a mishap. He had a fall from horseback when *shikarring* and he was carried home dead. Mahaboob was in despair. She adored the Colonel and his death was a serious blow from which she could never recover. She pined and pined until she passed away. That was two years after the Colonel's death. With the death of her mother, Motidana's education came to a dead stop. The Colonel died almost poor. He was long a bachelor which is another name for a spendthrift. He had, however, left a little money behind. He had willed it away to Mahaboob and after her death to Motidana. This was a bait for bubblers. Mahaboob's brother who was a *gavaiya* had great hopes in Motidana. Mahaboob had left him her guardian. He overruled Motidana who wanted to continue her studies, made her a Mahomedan and commenced to give her lesson in Indian music in which she afterwards became an adept. It was this guardian's son, the *sarangiwalla*, that she afterwards married according to Mahomedan rites. The couple subsequently came down and settled in Bombay, where Motidana soon rose to fame and fortune. She looked every inch an English girl and had taken for

[1] Mahomedan divorce which consist of tying a rupee at the end of the wife's *sari* and implies that the marriage is void. The Mahomedan law accepts this.

some time to stage acting. She was tired of its temptation however and as she liked her independence she became a singer and dancer. Stage singing was not to her taste and talents. Though never in love with her husband she was never disloyal. She lived a virtuous life and her end was virtuous.

This was what the papers said and a great deal more, with which we will not tire the reader. Evidences of her English parentage were but too evident in her house. It was furnished in mixed English and Mahomedan style, except the *mujra*-room which was strictly for Hindus and Mahomedans.

CHAPTER XLV

THE INQUEST

"*The jury, passing on the prisoner's life,*
May, in the sworn twelve, have a thief or two
Guiltier than him they try: what's open made to justice
That Justice seizes."

SHAKESPEARE'S *Measure for Measure.*

POOR dear Rustom ! How misguided and yet how innocent ! Innocence is however an armed heel against accusation, though sometimes it is the reverse. His cup of trouble and bitterness was now complete. It was twelve when the Police Station was reached. The police enquiries had swallowed time wonderfully. He had not washed or broken his fast ; not so much as a drop of water had crossed his lips. He could have stood it at ordinary times but just then he could stand it no more. He was about to ask for a draught of cold water, when Mehelooji, Bahadurshah and Aga arrived. They talked to Mr. Anderson and some rations were produced from an Irani's restaurant but Rustom would not touch them. He took only a cup of tea. It was time for the jury now. The police vans were at the door and Rustom and his accusers were hurried to the morgue.

The Coroner like all coroners was unavoidably an Englishman. He was one Mr. Puffkin, a solicitor in somewhat sorry practice. He puffed and blowed, blowed and puffed, until he could puff no more. He was so very puffy. He looked at his watch now and again, looked at the police and looked at the jurors, and looked as if he would punish Father Time for flying so quickly. He had so much to do, so much to read, so much to write in his own office. He thought of the clients who must be waiting for him. His eyes looked at the delicate cane-stick which was his constant companion. His fingers

itched and he rubbed his hands slyly as much as to say, if I were one of your village pedagogues I would have caned you, my men, all round, aye, given you a taste of it for keeping me here so long. The police noticed his impatience. Silence was proclaimed and the proceedings began. Mr. Aga appeared to watch them on behalf of the accused.

Aye ! aye ! We are forgetting the jury. The great jury on which so much depends ! It consists of twelve men. It is not a standing body nor a body of men known to the public. It is picked up by the police from the streets at their sweet will and pleasure for the police like the Coroner have so much to do and so much to unravel. After the jury comes the Magistrate and then the Judge. The Judge will have a better constituted jury. Why then bother the Coroner with a clever jury ? A clever jury would but be a curse as it would take up the time of the Coroner with its nasty cant. The Coroner's jury has been stigmatized and scandalised. Government have heard of the scandal and corked their ears. Why? Because the people are so foolish. They have asked for a full-time Coroner but have not asked for a revision of the jury constitution. Perhaps they think that wretches must hang that the jurymen may dine.

The foreman was a poor Parsi clerk who had outgrown his coat and trousers and looked as if he was foredoomed. He had never before been on a jury, much less in a law court. His knowledge of English was very indifferent. His lips were constantly moving. He was repeating *Yetha* and *Ashem* and praying to God to carry him through this valley of the shadow of death as quickly as possible. The holiday from the office did not count for it would be for the day only and his work would accumulate. Amongst the other jurors there was a Marwari usurer, a big and burly specimen of his species, with a dirty *bundi*, a dirtier *dhoti* and a still dirtier *ooperna* rolled up and held tight under the armpit. He was going to a client to get his *vyaj* (interest) when the police laid siege to him. He swore to visit the sin

of the police on his victim. There was a Hindu carpenter who seemed to have given himself up to sheer despair for the law was not going to compensate him for the loss of his wages. He and the Marwari were as innocent of English as unborn babes. Next in order came a *tatya saheb* [1] with a smattering of English, which he was anxious and proud to parade. He paraded it unceasingly. He had not yet slept off the overnight spree. He was not a prize for the police and what juror at such inquest is? The police repented their choice in this case but it was too late to replace it. There was a Luhana, a *Kapadia* by profession, with bundles of clothware on one of his shoulders. He was thinking how best to move the commiseration of his brethren on the jury and persuade them to buy his wares. The fear lest the *pili-pughriwallas* should charm some of it away haunted him. The one however that formed the centre of attraction was a Hindu boy actor, one of those who are known as *bhavaiyas* and who though males act the part of females. His raiments were peculiar. They were neither male nor female. Those belonging to his masters he had left at the theatre but his personal property still adorned his person. It consisted of a tight-fitting lady's under-garment, pointed French made shoes and silk stockings and gaiters. He breathed defiance at the police and quietly indulged in a doze. Sitting by him was a Chinai *bungdiwalla* who traded in glass bangles. He was thinking if he could convert some of them into iron shackles for the Coroner and the police, who had dared to detain him. He was carelessly consulting his neighbour, a Mahomedan *kanmaelwalla* [2] who was the half-brother of our worshipful friend Tore-i-bajkhan. His instruments of skill which consisted of cotton-topped *kandees* [3] and tiny silver scoops were safely cornered behind his ears. We will not surfeit the reader with a description of the other jurors; it would be too overpowering and we have the reader's feelings to consult, and above

[1] A term jocularly used for Deccani or Maratha Hindus.

[2] Cleaner of ears. [3] Thin sticks.

all to respect and honour those of the powers that be.

The preliminaries having been gone through, the Police Surgeon's written statement was laid before the Coroner. He began by saying that it was a very mysterious case. It might be murder or it might be natural death, though he was more inclined towards the latter. It was the cause of death that baffled his long experience and luminous skill. There was a deep wound in the back in the right side. A suicide could not have selected the back for the stab. It must be another person's hand that inflicted it, very likely a man's heavy hand. The action he thought must have been premeditated. There could not have been a struggle for the wound was deep and straight. The curious point about it was that there was very little blood from the wound. Considering the constitution of the deceased and the nature of the wound there ought to have been much more, he should say, a regular flow. The medical examination did not show it and the police had also failed to find it. Coming to the examination of the other parts of the body, he mentioned the wound on the head. He was sure it was the result of sudden fall and severe contact with some hard substance, which must be the iron chair. There must have been a copious flow of blood from that wound for the hair was clogged and the face and dress on the side of the wound were besmeared. A further examination of the body, especially the chest, inclined him to the belief that there must have been heart convulsions or cramps. But for the wound on the back he could have at once fixed on these as the cause of death. Convulsions like this cause a fall and death often follows immediately. The wound in the head might have stunned but could not have killed. It was in too safe a position to do that. There were no injuries in any other part of the body. They were untouched and healthy. Altogether he would say that the cause of death was neither suicide nor accident ; it might be natural or forced. He was not inclined to the latter view. It might be that the intending murderer thinking life was not quite extinct wanted to make assurance doubly sure, to say more clearly, to cause

or accelerate death. A dead body keeps warm sometimes for a couple of hours, which misleads laymen. He had read of such cases though they were very rare. Thus concluded the surgical report, which was explained to the jurors under the Coroner's orders.

The accusers were then deposed. Murtuja said that the knife she saw in the body she could recognize. It was the same that was purchased in the cutlery mart by her *Baisaheb* only four days ago for kitchen purposes. She had looked for it in the morning and missed it. She had seen Rustom going to the kitchen at about five in the morning and then going in the direction of the *mujra*-room. Her curiosity was roused and she had followed him unperceived. She had not looked at the clock for she did not know how to read it. But she could say it must have been about half-past five. The juror sitting next to the foreman told him he was looking like a dummy; if he the juror had been the foreman he would have stultified the court of enquiry by his questions. The foreman thought the juror was not wrong. He would ask a question. He repeated *Yetha* and *Ashem* and ventured forth.

"Was it Standard Time or Bombay Time? The Railway clocks keep Standard Time; and so does the Rajabai Tower Clock. But our Municipal clocks always show Bombay Time. I am a Municipal servant, Sir."

"Hang your Municipality," observed Mr. Puffkin. "It is always slow. We don't want Municipal servants to blab here; we have enough of that in that den of theirs, which they call Council Hall."

The foreman thus snubbed crouched back into his chair. He wished he were dead. He would go and tell his Municipal masters what the Coroner had said and await their decision. Two or three jurors had intended to ask questions before the foreman did it. But now they congratulated themselves they had not done so. The juror who had put up the foreman was our friend the Marwari. He did not know what the Coroner had said in English but he gathered from that

functionary's looks that it was a sharp rebuke. He was jolly glad as the Parsis miss no opportunity of teasing and mortifying the Marwadi Jews.

The old crone then proceeded to say that when she approached the door of the *mujra*-room, which was the door facing the corridor, Motidana had entered that room by the inner door which intervened her own bedroom and the *mujra*-room. Rustom had then concealed himself in a corner. There was a flickering light in the room ; it was a cocoanut-oil light or *buttie*. She did not know why her *Baisaheb* had entered that room. It might have been to get something she may have wanted. When Motidana was fairly in the middle of the room Rustom issued out of his hiding and thrust the knife into her back. She tottered and fell face forward. She, the witness, was frightened to death. She did not remember if her *Baisaheb* shrieked. But speaking for herself she shrieked vehemently. The shrieks brought the four male accusers to the spot. They caught Rustom almost red-handed. Rustom wanted to run away but the accusers were too many for him. She blessed them ; for what could she, a frail weak woman, have done ? She was a poor lonely widow and quite supportless now that her mistress was dead. The *saheb*, meaning the Coroner, should have pity on her and she hoped he would let her go.

" Dash the woman and her tongue ! " said the *sahebly* spirit so invoked. " It is very long." It was a signal for the police to remove the witness.

The male accusers' statements went to support that of the one who preceded them. The *tabalchi's* went a little further. He said that the accusers were at the *mujra* last night and that he had followed them down the stairs with the other visitors when the *mujra* was over. They offered to stay behind and spend the rest of the night in his room. He saw no objection to the proposal and acceded to it. At five-thirty in the morning they heard loud shrieks which seemed to issue from the *mujra*-room. The four men

went to that room and he, the witness, ran for the police. He did that as a strange fear of something serious had come over him. The police were soon on the spot and they saw everything.

Rustom was then asked what he had to say. Mr. Aga said that he was there for him and that he had advised him to reserve his defence.

The Coroner then summed up. He said the case was a curious one, the evidence weighed heavily against the accused. The case would have been simple enough but for the opinion of the Police Surgeon. That Officer could not decide on the cause of death. If he had pronounced that the wound caused by the knife was surely the cause, then the jury's course would have been quite clear. They could have safely said that Motidana was murdered, without pronouncing who the murderer was. But as matters stood the cause of death was a sealed book to them. He, the Coroner, thought the verdict should be based on the opinion of Mr. Peter Pet, the Police Surgeon, whose skill and experience were beyond doubt. The verdict should be, he thought, that Motidana had died either a natural death, death by accident, or death caused by mortal hand through the medium of the knife.

The summing-up was then translated to the jury by the Coroner's clerk and they were asked to consult. The jurymen looked at one another. It was all moonshine to them. They were quite at sea. Mr. Anderson, seeing their difficulty, asked them to retire to the next room. He followed them and advised them at their request. The foreman at last managed to scrawl the opinion of the jury on a piece of paper. It was to the effect that Motidana had died either by natural death, accident, or by a deadly wound inflicted by some person unknown. The jury could not decide upon the actual cause. But considering the depositions of Murtuja, Tore-i-bajkhan and others, they were of opinion that it was for the police to shift the whole thing to the bottom and to proceed further against the suspected offender or offenders. The jury was unanimous. They then

returned to the inquest room and the foreman read out the verdict. The Coroner agreed with the verdict and discharged the jury.

* * * *

From the morgue Rustom was removed to the Mazagaon Police Court to be placed before the Magistrate. The accusers were also taken there. When Rustom was placed before the Magistrate Mr. Anderson explained the circumstances under which he was apprehended and read out the verdict of the Coroner's jury. The police knew the accused. He belonged to a very respectable family and so far as they were aware he was up to the day of Motidana's death on good terms with her. The police could not say the same of the accusers. They knew but little of Murtuja. She had said she was an eye-witness to the crime. But such statements have often been found to be false. The police knew the male accusers and knew their character, which was far from being good. Under these circumstances the police must have time to investigate the matter thoroughly and to gather information before it could charge Mr. Rustom Delaver with murder. The Magistrate thereupon adjourned the proceedings for a fortnight, during which time Rustom was remanded to jail. At Mr. Anderson's request the Magistrate also directed that the accusers, the *sarangiwalla* and the *tabalchi* be kept in safe custody until further orders, as such a course was necessary for the purpose of the police investigations.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE PATHERNA

"Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone."

MILTON'S *Paradise Lost.*

THE *patherna* is a Gujarati word, originally meaning, cloth, carpet or *galicha* spread over the ground for the purpose of holding a gathering. Hence it has come to mean a gathering of Parsi female mourners met together at the house of a deceased person or his relatives for the purpose of offering condolences. The old Persians called it a *mujlis.* The *patherna* begins almost immediately with death. *Galicha* and carpet were soon spread out in the large staircase room on the ground floor of Meher Villa. Pillows were laid against the wall for the favoured few. Before an hour was out women from long and short distances began to come in :—Women, old and young, fashionable and unfashionable, showy and simple, handsome and ugly, who cared or did not care for the deceased during her lifetime and who felt or did not feel for her after she was gone. This was the evening *patherna.* The real *patherna* would be on the next day which was to be the day of the funeral.

The gents who also came in were accommodated on long rows of chairs formed on the public footpath in front of Meher Villa. Their conversation was most diverse. It was like the seven colours that diversify the face of nature. Their thoughts were like wandering spirits that depend for their vitality on the magnetic current of feeling. Some felt for their losses on the race-course and wrangled over it. Some talked of the eternal war, some of

the share bazar, some of the Home Rule, some discussed the *Juddin* question, some attacked the Corporation and some took shelter in golden silence. Few there were that felt for the deceased and talked about her feelingly.

The lady condolers soon fell a-chattering and a-whispering and a-trying to find out the real cause of death. Their camp was divided into three distinct divisions. There were the extremists, there were the moderates and there were a few neutrals. Division number one formed the large majority. And it was they that were in charge of the condolence battery. The moderates were for passive resistance and the neutrals were mute. It is said that a reforming age is fertile of impostors. Division number one confirmed this. Division number two consisted of those who carry condolence without consolation. Division number three were the real mourners. They were really grieved ; and grief is best pleased with grief's society and seeks shelter and safety in silence. What was it ? questioned the querulous. Had the deceased really died a natural death ? Was it not a case of suicide ? Were there not ill-will and quarrels in the family ? Had not the case in the law-court proved it ? Had it not ended in the utter defeat of the deceased and her mother ? Such things have happened and why should they not have happened in that house ? Was not the father a horrid beast ? Was he not persecuting the deceased and her mother ? Was not the young girl Roshan an ill-tempered girl so much unlike the deceased ? Surely the Magistrate must have been bribed or else he would not have decided against them. There were some feeble protests and some gentle remonstrances from the moderates. But the majority who mostly consisted of vixens and viragos soon overruled them. And it was ultimately agreed that there was a mystery attached to that mournful occurrence, which Father Time will not conceal for ever. To this a rider was added by some which was to the effect that it was a clear case of suicide, but the mystery was as to how it was committed. Was it arsenic, was it opium, or was it

strychnia ? Time had to reveal that and time will assert itself.

The lady of the house is usually too busy to grace the first day's *patherna* with her presence except during the night when the inmates and the lady visitors stretch themselves over the *galichas* whilst the *Mobed* is chanting prayers near the deceased in a sonorous but monotonous voice.

The next day was not slow to dawn. The funeral was announced to start at 3-30 P.M. for the *Dokhma* or Tower of Silence, which is now in danger of being supplanted by un-Zorastrian Parsi *Kabrasthans* or burial grounds. At a much earlier hour, the staircase hall was thronged by ladies and the *patherna* was packed like sardines. The more the money, the more the mourners. The gents came in at a later hour and formed the *oatla* ; for they knew but too well that Parsi funeral processions as a rule do not start until an hour or two after the notified hour. Erach being a close relation and friend of the family considered himself to be the principal male mourner. He thought he had a right to exhibit his grief at the very feet of the departed. He rushed into the ladies' gathering as if half distracted and mad with grief. This was just the time when the ladies were arranging the mourning battery into working order and were about to start it. He knelt down exclaiming, " O Shera, Shera, light of my eyes, where hast thou gone ? Why hast thou not taken me with you? Why wouldst thou go alone ? Who is to look to me ? Who will look to your mother ? You have left us to the mercy of wolves and vultures. Life without you will be life without light, love, ambition, glory,—a lifeless life indeed. Take me, take me, with you. I will not rise until you tell me that you will. Or take me now or rise and let me take your place. O Meherbanoo, Meherbanoo, my mother, you feel for me and I feel for you. We are the only companions in grief." If anything was wanted to let the long tongues of the women loose it was this.

A middle-aged lady in black with a beak-nose, low forehead and lobster-cheeks opened the battery. " *Bava* Erach, gone, gone,

your happiness is gone—gone because of the graceless ; gone because of the unmerciful, cruel, carnivorous man-eaters, who call themselves your relatives ; gone because of the man who ought to have been a father unto you as he was by blood the father of dear dear Shera. It's no use your weeping now, dear boy ; tears will not avail you. Grief will only grind you to death." " Right, right you are," said an old vixen. " And when were you not, sister Dosibai ? The dead are happy. They take their troubles with them. It is the living that die the real death. It is they that will suffer. Darling Sherbanoo is happy now, as happy as she was unhappy before. O God, do everything so long as you do not give a bad father to any one." This was the signal for the bad father's good wife to take the command in her own hands. " Bad ! " she said. " Bad is too mild a term for him. It is like calling Satan saint. Bad as he is he would not be so bad but for his bad company. That sister of mine when living was no less than a life-hunter. Her progeny is no less so. *Mai, mai*, it is they that have been her death. It was they and their friends that dragged us to court and exposed us to public ridicule." 'The they and their friends' comprised Thriti, Roshan, Chandan and Dinbanoo. They were seated in a group in an almost invisible corner. They trembled in their shoes at this onslaught. They felt a strange sensation creeping all over their backs. They were not for retorting. Their attackers knew this but too well and were preparing to make a fresh attack, when Bahadurshah and Mehelooji came in ;—came in with looks full of vehement eloquence, looks which though silent spoke volumes, looks that penetrated deep into the ingrates that looked at them. At sight of them Erach slunk off. They beckoned to the victims of the onslaught to rise and follow them. " Come," they observed in an undertone, " this is no place for you now." Their word was law. They rose, made low obeisances to the dead and followed the two men out of the room. They were put into a motor and packed off to Bahadur Mahal. Their departure removed the deadlock.

"Shame ! Shame ! Better gone than here. Their presence polluted the room. It was an insult to the dead. We should not have tolerated it so long. How shall we answer the poor dear saint for this sin ?" spoke several women almost in one voice.

It was high time now for the *Ghe-i-Sarna* or funeral prayers which commenced forthwith. Its commencement is a strict injunction to the women to be silent. To whine and whisper, to cry or clamour, during the continuance of this ceremony is a sin ;—a very wholesome injunction, one to thank and bless the enjoiners for. The funeral at last went out and the women's tongues went forth again until they could go no further.

The reign of hypocrisy was over for the time being. Hypocrisy, that gilded pill, that is composed of two natural ingredients, natural dishonesty and artificial dissimulation.

The Parsis are very slow, aye callous, in removing many unreligious practices and observances which have glided in under the name of religion. The *Ghe-i-Sarna* though a prayer is not a prayer appropriate to the occasion. Besides, being unnecessarily long, no part of it except a very small one has anything to do with either the *las* or corpse, the *ravan* or soul or the *Ferohar* which is the spirit of good genius which is supposed to exist and visit this earth after the soul has departed.

The Parsis, laymen and priests alike, have known this but too long and yet their apathy is so great that they would not lift a finger to remove such an undesirable incongruity. So much for the so-called progress of a so-called progressive community.

CHAPTER XLVII

MEHERBANOO AND HER MEHER : GRIEF VERSUS VANITY

" O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser God had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would ? "

TENNYSON'S *The Passing of Arthur.*

MEHER Villa, though usually quiet enough except when family quarrels reigned supreme in the quarters of the quarrelsome, was topsy-turvy to-day. It rang with the tread of busy feet and the incoming and outgoing of visitors, obstreperous and officious. Meherbanoo was soon busy consulting the old crones, rich widows and wealthy maids, about the small and big details of the funeral that was going to be and the rites and rituals that were to follow in its wake. The *Mobeds* were soon about her. They vied with the female counsels and by way of a make-up, an advisory council was soon formed. The council knew that the lady of the house had the leading voice therein, and the lord of the manor who tried to have a voice in the council was always outvoted ; so much so that he took counsel with himself and retired to a corner to avoid a conflict. Meherbanoo pretended to be an economist. Her economic conscience was always roused but on this occasion it was dead. For had she not her prestige to keep up ? Had she not a credit to maintain ? Had not her ancestors willed away large sums of money, may be to spend it rightly, may be to waste it after death ? Had it not given her a handle, an object to busy herself with ? Was it not an object-lesson to her and an occasion to be liberal, when she was

usually thought to be so illiberal ? It was a time to stand above all, a time to show how rich she was, a time to show that she was not going to be behind-hand or beggarly. She was a reading woman ; she knew that rites and ceremonies are not religion. She also knew that there can be religion without ceremonies but no ceremonies without religion. Keen students of *Avesta* and *Ghathas* had taught her that. She believed in those teachings ; but she was afraid of practising them, afraid of what the women would say, afraid of the *Mobeds*, and last but not the least afraid of designing *Dasturs* and of the self-imposed and self-styled leaders of her community. She must have fifty *Mobeds* to accompany the funeral ; she must have vehicles ready to carry the followers of the funeral back from the Tower of Silence to their homes. Shera had died about five in the evening. Her relics could have been conveyed to their last resting place the next morning. But her mother delayed it till the next evening, to get together a grand gathering and to give time to up-country friends and relatives to attend. She had asked Erach to send urgent telegrams to them. She must have a showy *Chealıroom* [1] and evening and early morning *uthumnas* [2] besides *oatlas* [3] ; above all a full eighteen days' *dosla* or *muktat* [4] and not a ten days' one, for the latter though strictly enjoined by religion yet has been outvoted by the single vote of a self-constituted *Dasturan-Dastur* or Head-Priest and a handful of his moulders and uplifters. It is these men and those like them that stand between the superstitious and unprogressive orthodox and his creed and the progressive and enlightened reformer desirous of resuscitating the true spirit and essence of his religion. It is these men, who would rather see the entire sub-

[1] Fourth day ceremonies after death.

[2] Third day's death ceremonies, borrowed from Hindus.

[3] Gatherings of male mourners.

[4] Outward symbols or observances in honour of the dead, consisting of flowers, green and dry fruit, etc., which, when mixed with undesirable appendages, assume the form of idol-worship.

version of Zorastrianism than give up their new-fangled doctrines and dogmas. They are the men, who call themselves *Soshiants* but who are really and trully evil-doers, social and religious. We have seen Mehelooji apostrophizing them in his mental review of malpractices practised in the name of religion.

Meherbanoo was a Shehenshahi [1] on her father's side and a Kadim [2] or Kadmi on her mother and husband's sides. This was a facer. How was she to go about ? Should the after-death ceremonies be according to the Shehenshahi observances or according to those of the Kadims ? There was a division of votes in the confabulatory council. Those who where Shehenshahis voted for the Shehenshahi ceremonies ; and those who were Kadims voted for the Kadim ceremonies ; but those who were situated as Meherbanoo was, voted for both. The last-mentioned were in the minority. Meherbanoo was between the far off pole and the pole star. To perform double-barrel ceremonies would be but a partial acknowledgment of the rights of her married partner. But the glory and the *poon* [3] would be all the greater. Shehenshahi ceremonies alone would on the other hand be less expensive but just then money was not a consideration. The minority who voted for the 'double-dealing,' were affluent and influential and were, therefore, all powerful. To refuse to be guided by them would be a signal for them to boycott the house. It was the minority, therefore, that triumphed. The triumph of the minority was the triumph of the *Mobeds* also. They had kept themselves in the background because they had felt sure of the judgment. This is the way, think the *Dasturs*, think the *Mobeds*, think the self-constituted leaders and after them the community to be happy and gay. Well-a-day ! we shall say.

There was only one thing wanted to complete Meherbanoo's

[1] & [2] Two sections of the Parsi community, which are neither more nor less than a huge mockery and a satire on Parsi civilisation and progress.

[3] Reward supposed to be awarded by heaven for so-called charitable deeds and for prayers and ceremonies unwarranted by religion.

programme. It was the selection of charities to which funds should be voted. There was a regular downpour of appeals for help from charitable bodies. This was another facer. It was a trial of Meherbanoo's *meher*. The *meher* must be suited to her standing and position, her name and her fame, her wealth and her virtues. The present-day Parsi charities are as great an anachronism, as great a chaos, as confusion itself. They are indiscriminate and indiscreet. Many of them are a show and a sham. It is these that guide ; these that rob charity of its virtues. The bodies that want most get but the least ; and *vice versa*. And yet, they want charity to be enduring. O Charity, divinely wise, thou meek-eyed Daughter of the Skies ! Dost thou not laugh at us from thy ethereal abode, aye, even shed tears over our misdemeanour ?

These death ceremonies have a strange effect on devout Parsi women, illiterate and educated. The effect is so great that it makes them forget even grief. Meherbanoo had loved Shera ; but even if it were otherwise she would not have hesitated to spend, aye, waste, for mere love or liking. She did not love her husband ; she did not love Roshan ; but God forbid should anything happen to both or either of them she would waste more on their death than she did on that of Shera. For then she would like to belie what the world believed, namely, that she liked or loved them not. She voted large and small sums of money to charitable objects and institutions, which needed them not, and left out the very ones that needed them most. She was pleased to see her name as sole disposer of the large-hearted bequests looming large in black on white, pink and yellow in the newspapers. It pleased her and laid the qualms of conscience low ; for were not the lucky recipients of her bounty in vogue and was she not the slave of fashion ? Did she not fashion everything in her house and round and about her as she liked ? Had she not the approbation and applause of her councillors ?

Then where had Meherbanoo's grief gone? Gone with its giver. The cruel world, the one in which she moved and which was her own, had destroyed it. Shera's death was a grief as well as a relief. It had made Meherbanoo all-supreme. For Shera was like a curb on her curvature. It had removed and shut out from her eyes the sting of her ignominious defeat in the law-court. She did not admit this; but her heart admitted it all the same. Where were Ardeshir and Roshan all that while? Form and fashion required that they should stay at least for a while with Meherbanoo under the same roof, live on the scene of death, live with the *Ferohars* that are the spirits of the dead and that are supposed to visit those whom they loved and cherished in this world four days after demise and on *Ferverdegan* days which are ten in number. It was like living with the shadows of death. All this while, Ardeshir and Roshan lived their own life and carefully avoided all conflict. Ardeshir was a man. He could leave the house and leave his cares behind when out of it. But poor Roshan! She had no friends in the house, which was now so full of sisters, cousins and aunts and ominous uncles, as the English say. They served to keep the grief a-going and the mother a-spending. To the mother it was like the lovely southern breeze, bringing the lost love's own tidings on its wings. Roshan had no friends there, except Dinbanoo, Chandan and Shirin, Thriti, Jal and Jamshed, who saw her and consoled her as often and as long as they could. There was a sort of a truce between the husband and the wife, a sort of a laying down of the swords by tacit consent but for a while only. A truce, which was the forerunner of fresh onslaughts.

"Ardeshir," said Meherbanoo one day, "I have determined to have the *muktat* in this very house. I cannot send Shera's *Ferohar* [1] and those of my mother and father to any of the Fire Temples.

[1] The spirit of the dead. The good genius according to Zoraster which always guides the living in life for good and keeps him from evil.

I must have it in the house with suiting eclat. They must now leave the house at once." Meherbanoo used the pronoun 'they' without the antecedent but Ardeshir had no difficulty in knowing who she meant. They were Thriti and Jal. The *muktat* were to be on the ground-floor and Thriti and Jal lived on that floor.

"Meherbanoo, where will they go? Think of the inconvenience; think of the hard times; think of the rains; think of——"

"I have thought of everything; we must look to the dead. They are not dead. We will look to them when they are."

This was enough even to rouse an angel and Ardeshir was not an angel.

"Meherbanoo," he thundered forth without caring for the women who were standing by, "you are but a fiend in human form, a vulture, a bird of prey; you have no heart; I am ashamed of you. I will see that they go but they must have some time. You have harmed them enough and I will see that you do it no more. This house has long been unfit to hold them. There are so many to receive them with open arms; so many to shelter them."

"*Bava*, Ardeshir, you really are a strange person," said an old crone who was standing by. "You don't know how you are insulting dear dear Meherbanoo. A fig for such husbands! Better without them!"

This was a poser for Ardeshir and a poker for Mrs. Ardeshir. It poked her passion.

"*Maiji*, mother, you are right. It is a dog's life that he has led me. He has run me down almost to death and will not be satisfied until I die. Oh! Where is that blessed day? When will it dawn?"

"People don't die for the mere asking, Meherbanoo," vociferated Ardeshir. "If they did, God's ways would be overturned. But death is a sure retreat from infamy. You and I are more divided in life than we would be in death. We would be better

dead than alive."

"What a man!" said a young widow in black weeds, a junior member of Meherbanoo's council. "He's worse than a beast. Mother mine, I've never seen such a man. Even mine was better. He had led me a beastly life but surely not so much."

"He wants my money. He knows he cannot get it till he has killed me. But I will outwit him. He won't get a farthing of it," said Meherbanoo.

"I spit at your house and I spit at your money. They are a curse. You are welcome to them. Come, Roshan," roared Ardeshir, "let us leave the curse behind."

Poor Roshan! She had stood petrified at the outburst. It was a regular duel of words. Ardeshir took her by the hand and was for taking her out with him, when a volley of angry voices staggered him. There were hisses and hoots, cries of shame and contemptuous ejaculations from the womenfolk. Don't let her go! said one. It's a shame! said another. Downright shame! said a third. A scandal! said a fourth. He can go but the girl must not! said a fifth.

"She shall not!" screeched the wife. "He dare not take her away. I will see her dead first." She rushed between the father and the daughter and tried to force him to let go the girl's hand. The man thrust the woman aside. The woman was roused. She flew at him and planted her long nails in his face. A push from the man and the woman would have fallen, had not Erach who had just come in caught her in his arms.

"Catch her and keep her there for ever if you like. I don't want her and she does not want me," roared the resigning husband.

"You are a Satan!" said the infuriated rival.

"You are Satan's own sire," retorted the still more infuriated husband.

Erach had transferred his tender burden, who had pretended

to faint, to the motherly arms of the crone and was about to rush at Ardeshir, when Mehelooji and Bahadurshah came in. They stood between the antagonists and very effectively prevented a breach of the peace. Erach who was a coward had always stood in awe of Mehelooji, who ruled him as it were by the eye. Bahadurshah shouted to the women to be quiet. He told them that they were only adding fuel to the fire. If they wanted to be in the house, they should not poke their noses in matters which did not concern them. This put up the back of some of the women. They rose, drew the ends of their *saris* over their heads and thrust their feet in their loose slippers as if quite prepared to depart. It was a signal for the woman who had fainted to come to her senses. She got over her feet, walked to her friends and clamoured for pity and mercy. Was the house that man's that they wanted to leave it? Were they so cruel that they would leave her just when she wanted them most? To give a stage effect to her activities, Meherbanoo put her arms round the neck of one woman, and then round that of another and another, as if she were a winding-machine and until she was too tired to do it any more. The women, who were not serious in their intention, yielded and resumed their seats. Ardeshir took advantage of this to slip away with Roshan, put her in Bahadurshah's motor, stepped in after her and asked the chaffeur to drive to Bahadur Mahal. Bahadurshah and Mehelooji followed the fugitives.

When at Bahadur Mahal the three wise heads were laid together. They decided that Jal and Thriti should vacate Meherbanoo's house forthwith. They should go to Mehelooji's. He and his wife wanted company badly and they could have no better than that of Jal and Thriti. Before the next day was out, Thriti, Jal and their household, animate and inanimate, were safely installed in a neat little cottage in Mehelooji's compound.

CHAPTER XLVIII

RULE A WIFE AND HAVE A WIFE

"In the married state, the world must own,
Divided happiness was never known.
To make it mutual, nature points the way :
Let husbands govern : Gentle wives obey."

COLLEY CIBBER.

RULE a wife and have a wife! Poor dear Ardeshir! He had a wife before he knew how to rule one for it was his parents that had engineered the matrimonial scheme for him. When too young he had ventured on a wife and had unknowingly run the greatest risk. His wife knew how to rule him and she had practically demolished him. In his case, therefore, it was like rule a husband and have a husband, though luckily for him he was not quite soft or spoony. We have seen that lately he had stood on his rights and stood up for those who were entitled to the benefits of those rights. All the same he had abdicated—abdicated without any reservation or condition. This is the state of man.

His successor on the matrimonial throne was his wife, who now ruled supreme at his house and was a Czarina *de facto*. Her favourite page in attendance was Erach. In the past, pages were great men. They were more powerful than ministers. The Khalifs of Bagdad, the Turkish and Moghul Pashas and even some of the Persian Shahs had their favourite *gulams* or pages. But it was rarely that they lived together to the end. If the king did not kill the page, the page managed to kill him. On Czar Ardeshir's abdication, the page Erach was openly installed and established himself like a cock of his walk in the Czarina's domain.

He was the Czarina's shadow. There was not a place in private or public where he was not seen with her.

A husband's restraint or rule, however weak, is still a restraint and a rule. A house without a husband is like a throne without a king. Meherbanoo, left to herself, did many a thing which she would not have done or dared to do under her husband's eye. She flirted with Erach to her heart's content ; she was in the sweet sixteen again. It is said that though women are angels, yet wedlock is the devil. Meherbanoo might have been an angel (by which I mean a very good woman, for a very good woman is an angel) if she could have married a man of her choice, or failing to secure such a one had remained unmarried. But poor Ardeshir ! How could he help it ? A philosophically inclined friend, who was somewhat of an incline himself, had told Ardeshir that woman's faith and woman's trust write their characters in dust. Ardeshir's mind constantly ran on this and he set about thinking how he should throw up his burden. He forgot that the burden had already lightened itself of its own weight.

People will talk and there is a lot of talk, especially where a wife with a husband, a mother with a grown-up daughter and a bold and besmeared bachelor are concerned. So they talked about Meherbanoo and Erach. The precious pair knew this and did not care to stop it. They knew it must go like a poisoned arrow into Ardeshir and they gloried. The arrow did go into Ardeshir. He thought of single blessedness again. But it was not now to be for him. The law, yes, the law, does not deign to take notice of an unlawful deed until it is proved to be so. Ardeshir wanted a divorce. But the matrimonial law opposed him tooth and nail. It must have positive proof of the wife's crime. The husband knew the wife was seriously to blame ; the wife herself knew it ; the bachelor knew it ; the world knew it ; but who were they that the law should recognise them ? The law graciously granted them the gruesome grant of a judicial separation, which meant separation

without actual severance, a difference without distinction, for the natural period of their earthly existence. The law left it to the skies either to reunite them there or to so separate them as to form other and happier unions.

If the law had separated Ardeshir and Meherbanoo for ever, Meherbanoo might have married Erach and the two might have been happy in their own way and lived a life of lawful wedlock. Ardeshir might have found his peace in his freedom and would either have remained unmarried or sought comfort in the arms of a sober and sedate consoler ; for to be once unlucky is not to be unlucky for ever. But this was exactly what the law did not allow. Then what did it allow ? Oh, it allowed a lot of things. It allowed Ardeshir the pleasure and the consolation of seeing his wife, who looked young for her age, fluttering in brocade, flouncing in petticoats and flirting with a gay man-about-town under his very nose round and about the town. It allowed him the pleasant disability of flying at the pair and pairing them asunder. It allowed him the satisfaction of seeing his wife and her paramour smile superciliously and laugh scornfully at him when driving past him in her *vis-a-vis*, drawn by her fine bay mare. It allowed him the delight of dolefully looking at the coachman, nudging his elbow in the syce's ribs and knowingly winking at him for his master's discomfiture. It allowed him to live on hope, hope which is but the dream of those that wake, hope which is the elixir of life, hope which is the obedient servant and the common property of all and sundry and which they can buy and live upon for nothing. Even in death there is hope and so Ardeshir hoped and hoped on till he could hope no more. His was but the hope of separation by the death of the one or the other. So much for what the law graciously allows the husband. And what does it allow the wife ? It allows her license to lounge luxuriously in her *gari*, look down on those who dare to look down on her, wear the looks of injured innocence, cast a withering

eye on those who tried to wither her, laugh with the light-hearted, growl at the growling and live as gaily and happily amidst the rays of mirth and gaiety as the day is long.

This is what they call law and this is what they call judicial separation, adjudicated by justice. Ardeshir could not sue his wife for a divorce on the ground of misconduct; nor could he willingly plead guilty even if he wanted to take the sin on himself without bespattering and tarnishing the good name and fame of some other woman. Meherbanoo would have dragged him to court for uncommitted sin. But she could not do it for two reasons. She knew that Ardeshir's reputation was well-known. He was in every sense a moral man and even the sharp claw of calumny could not maul his reputation. She also knew that so long as they remained apart under that sublime human law, that had ordained the separation without the severance, she could have the upper hand of her husband in more ways than one. She would have *carte-blanche* to do as she liked, to live in sinful love and to defy her wedded love. It was not also absent from her mind that under the judicial separation the wife has the option of making up her mind to return to her husband and that the court has the right to call upon the husband to show cause why he should not receive her back. She was a clever woman and she always embraced a new situation with peculiar vigour and aptitude. She had acquired full details of the law as it affected her present situation. Among other things she had learnt that in cases of matrimonial breaches of peace the husband is bound to pay his wife's expenses whatever be the issue of a judicial proceeding.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE BLIND DOCTOR'S SECOND PRESCRIPTION

"A noble mind
Makes woman beautiful, and envy blind."

FLETCHER.

"Be to her faults a little blind ;
Be to her virtues very kind ;
Let all her ways be unconfin'd,
And clap your padlock on her mind."

BICKERSTAFF'S *The Padlock.*

"O Mr. B—, how would it have been! O, how would it have been, if—"

The words were spoken by Thriti when the blind met the blind. I had called to see her and to congratulate her and Jal on the very happy issue of the case.

"— if it had been otherwise," I said. "But it could not have been otherwise, Thriti. What seems to us often to be so difficult may be really and truly so simple. It was all bound to terminate well and so it has. It has bettered you and Jal with every one. Who knows there may be greater good luck in store for you yet?"

"Why not greater pain?" put in Thriti. "O Mr. B—, how near were we to shame and degradation! We have escaped them once ; we may not be able to do so again."

"And yet it has not been without its own good," said I. "It has shown that a friend in need is a friend indeed and that you have more than one such friend. It has shown that there could have been greater misery for you than mere loss of sight. Besides, has it not strengthened your faith in God and in the virtue of British justice? That justice may fail

owing to deficiency of law and the default of medium but not through deficiency of desire. Poor Shera is gone ; gone not in her sins but sinless, for great was her atonement. Shera's extinction justifies your existence. You must now exist not for yourself, not for Jal, not for the old *Feringee* woman who has brought you up since you were a babe, but for the sake of the man who is now quite free to marry you."

"O Mr. B—, but what about—"

"You mean your blindness !" I said. "Don't you think I have more to blame it for than you ? More to complain and more to cry out for ? Look at me, my dear young lady. I have been blind these seventeen long years and more. Whilst you were suffering from the pangs of prosecution, there was a greater suffering for me ; a suffering greater than the loss of eyes ; a suffering which made me feel that loss in the fulness of its fury. That suffering was the loss of an only son. It was divine dispensation and what could I do but bow to it. Unlike the generality of youngsters I had no craze for making close friends. Men there were who pretended to befriend me and men there were who pretended to patronize me in my business for my sake but who did it for their own. They have left me now and I am not sorry for it. For I knew what they were worth. I was recently baulked of a goodly bit of money by a man who was my servant and whom I had befriended. May God pardon the man who cheated me, cheated the blind during his sufferings. Such is the world, Thriti. You remember your saying so yourself in that nice little letter of condolence which you wrote to me. Jal told me you insisted on your being allowed to write it in your own hand, though he offered to do it for you. Do you know who was with me when that letter reached me ? You don't ! Well, then, let me tell you it was Jamshed Aga. He it was that read the letter out to me. He refused to believe it could have been written by you. The letters are so legible, the writing so neat, he said ; there are the folding creases but they are

unavoidable. Do you know where that letter now is, Thriti ? It is in the safe keeping of a man of law. He asked for permission to preserve it as a useful property and appendage to his household assets and I allowed it. He said it will be a very useful evidence some day.''

" Evidence ! " asked Thriti.

" Yes," said I, " he has a faith, call it a blind faith if you like, that some day you will recover your eyesight, if not wholly, partially. When that happens he should like to bring the letter forward as evidence to prove what a blind can achieve and what you Mrs. Jamshed (for by that time you will no longer be a Miss) could achieve when she was only a Miss. I could not resist, for whilst pleading for himself he was pleading for you and I resigned the letter to him."

"O Mr. B—, you have taught me another good and grand lesson. I now know that there are ills, worse than the ill of blindness. You have often told me that the mind reads beyond the eye and that care keeps its watch in every old man's eye. You have shown me, how cruel and selfish I am. I have cried to you of my own blindness at every visit of yours, forgetting that you are suffering from the same ill, forgetting that yours has been longer and harder to bear, harder because of your age and of your sufferings. You have told me, Mr. B—, that good and evil come from God and that it is my duty to accept the good as I accepted the evil. I am prepared for it, Mr. B—, only don't tell Jamshed. I am prepared to—"

" To accept him when he proposes. But you forget, my dear," said I, " how many times he has proposed to you. What he now wants is marriage ; and what is marriage ? Marriage is a matter of more worth than to be dealt with by attorneyship. Take my advice, give up the proposing part of the business and take to the serious part of it."

At that moment Rosy brought in a sealed cover. It was from Meher Villa. The bearer said he had orders to deliver it to

Thritibai and get a reply.

"Jal, Jal !" cried Thriti.

The person appealed to, who was busy talking with the object of his marital attentions in another room, shrugged his shoulders, soured his countenance and ran to answer the call, followed by the said object who was no less than Roshan.

"Jal, just read that letter to me. It has come from there."

"There! " asked Jal gingerly. "From that corner ? Then you must have written it yourself. O Mr. B—, you here ? I am sorry I did not see you. Why is Thriti so afraid ? Whom's the letter from ? "

"Please to open it and see," said I.

"Oh," said Jal, opening the letter, "it's a golden letter. It reminds me of the goose that laid the golden eggs. It's a nice little round egg. Here, take it in your hand Mr. B— and see ; only don't swallow it, or we won't be able to get it out of you again."

"O, Thriti ! It's a ring ! " cried Roshan. And then she went off singing the song of "Ring, Ring the Banjo," which made me compose one for myself, "I wish I were young again." The spirit of youth is catching. Jal and Roshan's was particularly so. They were living now in a paradise of their own ; for them it was Heaven on earth, for it was the Paradise of youth. We all wish to be young again when we are too old to do it and even if I had prayed for that coeval condition earlier, would my prayer have been granted ? No ; because the young would then have no chance. The happiness of youth and the blessing of old age would be denied to them. It would be like "*vice versa*."

Poor Thriti ! Whilst Jal was joking her impatience increased.

"Jal, you are growing intolerable. What does it say ? "

"What ? The ring ! It has a good ring, see," he said, letting the ring fall on the paved floor. "It's guinea gold ;—fully worth thirty rupees a tola at the present day. But it can't speak. Its

ring says, sell me, for you won't like to keep me ; sell me and give the money away to J-A-L who wants it badly. Now don't, pray, don't pucker up your face, Thriti. It does not suit you. It is from that gingerbread,—that fellow who should have been hung long before but is still abroad. See, here is his letter which in itself is enough to hang him if you will only do it. Blast his impudence !"

Meher Villa,
Grant Road,
Date———

"Dear Miss Bloteye,

"Here's the beggarly piece of gold that you had put on my finger, doubtless thinking it was the finger of that other one. Take it and give it to him. It will serve him for a magnifier to look at your eye-blots. It is too hateful to remain here. See that you return mine with the bearer. He has been authorized to receive it. I only hope you have not put it with a Marwadi or sold it to meet your daily wants.

Yours, etc.,
Erach A. Aga."

Tears rose to Thriti's eyes. She felt a chill creeping all over her. She tottered and would have fallen, had she not thrown herself into the chair to which she was holding. Roshan rushed to her. Jal was not slow to follow.

"Jal," said Roshan, "you have been cruel. You have wounded, yes, heartlessly wounded Thriti with your untimely banter. Am not I right, Mr. B— ? "

"You are and you are not, my dear," said I. "Jal is not heartless. He only wanted to make light of the matter but he did not quite know how to do it."

"Then he should not make love to me," said Roshan. "He should wait until he is old enough and wiser to do it. Don't mind that naughty boy, Thriti. I will punish him. Can you suggest

the punishment, Mr. B— ? "

"Certainly, my dear," said I. "Put him in the *kunji*-room and don't talk to him for the rest of the day." Meantime, the bright little pair had circled their hands round Thriti's neck. Jal was begging of her to excuse him.

"Come," said I, "you must not be a child, Thriti. It's the last that we have heard of the affair and you must be glad of it. Where's the wretched ring that he wants you to return ? It should have been out of this house long ago ; but better late than never."

"O, it's here," said Jal, catching Thriti's hand. "No, it's not here. You have lost it. You will have to pay a heavy penalty."

"Jal, Jal," said Roshan, "will you never be serious ? "

"O Mr. B—, what can I do ? What can I do ? " said Thriti. "That ab—"

"Abominable ring," suggested I.

"Yes," said Thriti. "It so cruelly reminded me of all that has passed that—that—I could not bear to see it on my finger. I have locked it up."

She rose, walked to the cupboard, opened it and brought out the ring. It all came easy and natural enough to her. Her spirits were now completely revived. Just then someone came in, someone whom she was mentally looking for and who appeared to have read her thought. It was like telepathy ; the telepathy of two hearts, apart and yet united. It was the telepathy of lovers. Jamshed often told her that that accursed ring had no right to be in the house, much less on her finger. It must go.

"What's the stir now ? " inquired Jamshed. "Is it the Mr. Monstrosity ? "

The gentleman named was Mehelooji's favourite monkey. He doated on animals and his garden was noted for its beautiful little zoo.

"No ; it's not that, Jamshed," said Jal. "It's the Meher Villa Monstrosity. Mr. B— says it's the last of its kind. See,

here's the letter."

Jamshed read the letter, folded it up and put it in his pocket. His face clouded and he gnashed his teeth. At any other time he would have met Jal's pleasantry with pleasantry. But he was in a different mood now.

"Give me that hateful piece of gold, Thriti. It shall not sully even that drawer any longer."

Thriti handed the ring to him like a child obeying a senior. Jamshed quietly put it in an envelope, sealed it and handed it to Erach's man who was waiting on the verandah.

"There," said he, "see that you give it to him and to no one else. What's your name ?"

The man gave his name, which Jamshed noted on the back of the letter he had just put in his pocket. The man then left.

"But, Jamshed," said Thriti, — and she stopped.

"What's the trouble now ?" asked Jamshed. "You are thinking as to what you should do if that fellow says he has not received the ring. Well, then there's his letter. He says he has authorized his man to receive it. That must be enough for us. The man may put it in the gutter ; I shall be glad of it for that is its right place."

Just then a *gadia* of Toddy and *chataka* [1] came in from the main bungalow. It was from Mehelooji. He had seen Jamshed entering and making towards the cottage. He knew Jamshed liked Toddy, such Toddy as *Toddywallas* give not for money but for love and friendship.

The same day beheld, and the inmates of the *bungli* beheld too, a fine little golden ringlet encircling one of Thriti's fingers, which she was ineffectually trying to conceal. Jal told me all about it. I went up to Thriti and whispered to her my hearty congratulations.

Mattresses were spread out in the open under green shade and

[1] Tasty viands.

we sat down to do justice to the repast. Jal asked me to propose the toast of the happy pair.

"Here's to friend Jamshed and Thriti!" I said, holding a glassful of the beverage in my hand. "You know I am blind and yet I can read countenances and read thoughts. I see the countenances of both of you beaming with pleasure. They glow like the glowing sun. Jamshed, I see you slyly holding one of Thriti's hands. There, there, don't shy. We all had done it. I had done it and your children will do it. What better in this world, what more ennobling, than to hold the hand of one's betrothed? It is giving love and taking love. You are both happy, as happy as the day is long. Both of you would feign be alone. Only half an hour and we will set you at full liberty. You are both happy and yet methinks I see a tinge of sorrow on Thriti's face, just a little cloud which she would fain scatter away but which even this pure white beverage has not yet enabled her to do. You are thinking, Jamshed, how happy you would make Thriti; how you would lead her about and take pride in doing so; how you would read to her, talk to her, and how deeply interested she will feel; and how by way of return she would play on her instruments and sing to you; how she would love, serve and obey you. And what is that cloud on your mind, Thriti? You are thinking of your blindness. You are sorry you are unable to look on your fiancé at this supreme moment of your happiness. You feel doubtful if Jamshed will go on loving a blind girl for ever. You are doubtful if you have a right to marry him. You think you are inflicting a hardship on him. You are thinking of all this; and more. You wish your parents and your cousin Shera were alive and sitting with us to-day. Am I right? Your silence implies that I am. You forget, Thriti, that happiness cannot be unmixed. You forget that one cannot have all that one may wish for. Besides, is it not better as it is? Would a good and true man give up his wife just because God has been pleased to make her go

blind after marriage ? Would a good wife give up her husband were he to go blind after marriage ? Neither a good man nor a good woman will do it, if they be really good and true ; if they be not, they would be parting company for much less. Here is a case in point. A young and respectable Irani girl was betrothed last year to a poor but respectable Irani youth. Six months after betrothal the youth went totally blind. The girl's parents asked her to give him up. But she would not. When questioned why she was so obstinate she met the question by one of her own : ' Would you have asked me to give him up if he had gone blind six months after and not six months before marriage ? Would you have asked him to give me up if I, and not he, had become blind ? ' They have married and are quite happy. The young man is working hard and making enough to live upon. His wife's pleasure is to help him in his labours. Now here's another glassful to your health ! "

" Oh, Mr. B—" said Jamshed and Thriti almost in one breath, " you could not have read our minds better were you in full possession of your eyesight. You are so cute and so wise. There is wisdom in every word of yours."

" It's not a question of being wise or being in the possession of wisdom," said I. " It all depends on one possessing that happy faculty of encasing oneself in the present which dulls the edge of care. I have tried and acquired that faculty and it has stood me in very good stead even when I have been so severely tried. I have taken care to see that my tastes are not so exacting, nor my temperament so volatile, as to shroud me in the gloom that besets weaker natures in time of trouble."

" Mr. B—" said Jamshed, " let me assure you that my darling's countenance has now entirely cleared up. It is even brighter than my own and all through your words, so here's to your health ! "

CHAPTER L

RUSTOM IN THE LOCK-UP

"*One kind kiss before we part,*
Drop a tear and bid adieu ;
Though we sever, my fond heart
Till we meet shall pant for you."

DODSLEY'S *The Parting Kiss.*

AFTER poor dear Shera we must now go back to poor dear Rustom. From the living to the dead and from the dead to the living is as much in the order of things as life and death. Rustom was living ; but his incarceration was worse than death to him. The clutches of despondency and gloom, the misery of suffering innocence, were stronger than the incarceration. To-day we see him seated in the prison lock-up on a rugged *charpai* or bedstead, head downwards and in deep abstraction. The door of the lock-up was opened and he was told that there was a visitor for him. Before he could lift up his head, the visitor stood before him. She—for it was a 'she'–was there to see him by permission. The ' he ' could not bring himself to believe that it was the ' she,' the ' she '—whom he had never expected to see there but who was never out of his mind.

" You here ! You ! Mag ! Miss Macgregor ! you here ! Oh ! How kind ! How very very kind ! I do not deserve it, Miss Macgregor. Have you come of your own accord or under— "

" Under coercion, you want to say, Rusi,—Mr. Rustom. If it please you to know it, know it please that I have brought myself here."

" O Magdalene ! Magdalene ! Don't you think this recitation of Mr. Rustom and Miss Macgregor is out of place here ? Have not friends as much right to drop it as lovers ? We have been friends

long enough. Have we no right to drop it ?"

Magdalene smiled and hesitated but only for half a minute. Was she not there to please him? What right then had she to displease him just for the sake of conventionality ?

" If it please you, you may call me Magdalene," she said and stopped.

" It certainly will please me, if you will agree to call me Rusi," pleaded Rustom. " But—but—what right have I, a murderer, to apply for this privilege ? " He uttered the word murderer with such a strong sense of its ruthless intensity that it went into her very heart. She knew he was innocent ; she knew that under a rough surface he was only nourishing an innocent and tender heart, such a heart as could never be guilty or heartless.

" Rusi, you want to make me believe that you are guilty. But I feel, aye, my heart tells me that you are innocent. You must be ; you are not a man to be a murderer. The court has yet to pronounce that you are one."

" And if the court pronounce it, what then ? "

" Even then I will not believe it."

Rustom drew a deep sigh and his eyes moistened. He made for her hands and she put them in his. They were soon moist with the warm tears of bitter woe, that welled down his cheeks. A tear is an intellectual thing and a sigh is said to be the sword of an angel king ; the bitter groan of a martyr's woe is an arrow from the Almighty's bow. Magdalene was the angel king before whom the martyr Rustom had laid the offering of the sigh and the tear. She was but a woman. She knew that every woe can claim a tear ; and as Rustom's woe was great who was she that she should refuse that tribute to him ? She did not think to shed a tear when she entered the cell ; but Rustom had forced her out of his honest truth to play the woman. Rustom noticed two big tears in the corners of her clear and expressive orbs, which expressed so many things :—Kindness, conviction, sympathy, solicitude, solace and

what not. Could they not be the harbingers of long-harboured love and affection? Those two tears brought hundreds in their wake. They were intellectual tears and appealed to the intellect of the man for whom they were shed. He was a marriageable man and she a marriageable woman. It awaited the powerful element of love to seal a sacred union. Was that element absent here? No, it was not; for love penetrates into the precincts of palace and prison alike. They had long been thrown into each other's company, long been drawn together and were yet apart. They had disagreed over many a thing and agreed over more. But if anything the disagreement was more powerful than the agreement. It always is where love is. Rustom was loved by another but he had no idea he was so loved. She who loved him was unconscious of the intensity of her own feelings. There was no such unconsciousness or ignorance here.

"But why have you come here, Magdalene? Did you not think of what they will say?"

"They have said enough about us, Rusi. What more can there be yet for them to say?"

"Perhaps not about you and me; but about—about me and her I have murdered."

"You have murdered no one, Rusi. It is only slander that has murdered you. It's not merely conjecture but conviction that makes me say so. Somebody—somebody who is a relative and a friend of our family has told me so; somebody who is a good Christian though a policeman. I am sorry I cannot tell you who he is; but I will at the proper time. He is as much Scotch as I am. There, there, don't try to guess; I won't say yes even if you guess it aright."

"Have you come to tell me that only, Magdalene?"

"No, Rusi, I have much more to say. I was given only half an hour to be here. Half of it is already gone. I came to tell you not of my own conviction of your innocence but that you may be

sure that it will be proved; that you will be acquitted and honourably too. I came here to tell you this and—and—also because I want you to give me a promise."

"A promise, Magdalene! A promise! I will give you a hundred. I can refuse nothing to you."

"The promise I ask you, Rusi, to give me may be simple for you to give but difficult to keep—more difficult than the keeping of the hundred that you offer to give."

"Oh! Magdalene! How grossly you misjudge me!"

"Perhaps I do. But nothing will please me so much as the proof of it. You cannot give the proof now. But you can after you are set at large and are free to do what you like. I do not want to be hard on you, Rusi; pardon me if I seem to be doing so. You have not been much of your life what you ought to have been, what we should have liked you to be. You have in you the making of a great and good man, a man useful to himself and useful to society; but you have not availed yourself of it. You had splendid opportunities, which you have wasted. Pardon me, Rustom, but I—I think this trouble of yours is not so unwelcome. There is the hand of God in it; for it will show you the error of your ways and teach you to adopt better ways, if not for your own sake for the sake of those that like you and love you so much—those whose liking and love you have so cruelly rejected. Oh Rusi if you could only know how they have felt for you,—those two—and how they feel for you now!"

Poor Rustom! What could he say? It seemed to him as if Motidana had come to life again. For had she not told him on the eve of her death what Magdalene was telling him now? His grief was too deep for words. He knew who those two were. They were Mehelooji and Chandan; Chandan, his sister, and Mehelooji, his brother, his father and his friend all in one. He could only bury his face in his hands: and man as he was he wept like a child. Weeping is but the ease of woe. It eased his heart and

eased his mind. Whilst the man wept, woman-like the woman had placed one of her tender hands on one of his shoulders. He took that woman's other hand in his own and pressed it—pressed it into both his eyes, pressed it on his cheeks and pressed it on his forehead ; aye, he even made bold to kiss it. What man under such circumstances would not have? For kissing is the key of love ; it is always a silent petition with willing lovers. The woman did not withdraw her hand or object to the kiss. Her eyes were too full of tears and her heart too full of sympathy to allow her to think of it. The man's petition brought the woman's sympathy to the surface.

"I was telling you, Rusi," she murmured through her tears, "how those two like and love you. You have broken their hearts more than you have done yours. They spend most of their day in praying for you. God will hear their prayer. He will surely hear yours if you hear mine."

The man who had hitherto held one of her hands now held both of hers in his. "Magdalene, you say, those two like and love me. Is there no one else that does it? Do you not like me? Do you not love me? Will you not allow me to like and love you? O! Say, Magdalene, that you like me and will allow me to love you and that—"

The woman was silent. There were strange workings at her heart and strange doings at her throat. There were no words from her ; only the silence was eloquent.

"Rusi," she said at last, "time is flying and you have not given me the promise. But how could you? For I have yet to tell you what I want you to promise. Promise me that as soon as you are free you will turn over a new leaf and be a changed man altogether. Promise that you will fly, fly from all temptations, fly from those who are now flinging their hands round your neck and calling you their dear dear friend. For then alone will you be your own friend and a friend to those who love you. At present you are your

own enemy. Fly, Rusi, fly, after you are free, fly if needs be to the farthest end of the world ; for therein lies your salvation. Mehelooji will supply you with enough to make your fortune ; though I know you can make it yourself. This is the promise I want from you, Rusi. Will you give it ? "

" That I do ; and so help me Hormuzd. So help me Zoraster. There ! Does that not satisfy you, Magdalene ? "

" Satisfy me, Rusi ! It is more than satisfaction. It will take an immense load off their minds ; it has already removed it from mine."

Then looking at her wrist-watch, " Come, Rusi," she said, " there is not much time now—only five minutes. I must be going."

" Magdalene, you shall not ; you shall not until you tell me that you love me and that you will help me to be good and great."

All courage and all restraint had now ebbed away. The woman was less than a woman now. She was but a child in the man's hands. He drew her close to himself, drew her head on his shoulder and caressed her. It gave vitality to love.

" Magdalene, will you not promise to marry me ? Time is flying. Say that you will. It will be a sustainer and a supporter, sustainer to me in my loneliness and supporter in the uphill fight against fortune."

" How can I, Rusi ? "

" Why not, Magdalene ? Has the breath of scandal prejudiced you ? Do you think I have thought of any one else in the same light ? Do you believe what they say about me and Motidana ? "

" No, Rusi, it is not that that troubles me. I know many have run after you and that you have liked and loved none. I know Motidana was as guileless as yourself. I know you like and—"

" And love you," put in Rustom.

" Yes, love me for myself, if you will have it ; for I feel sure you care not for that little scar and the limp. But you must care,

Rusi, for the great difference in our race and religion. My people will say nothing,—they are too open-minded to do it ; but think of yours, think of their prejudices, think of the invidious distinction they make, think of the trouble that will follow."

"I think of nothing," said Rustom. "I think only of my Mag and her love. I am free to select my own partner in life ; for it is I that am seeking her, not my people. My religion does not forbid it ; and who are my people that I should honour them more than my religion ? Besides, Magdalene, where we shall go my people will not follow. We can be happy in spite of them. Come, Magdalene mine, promise."

The promise was given, given as whole-heartedly and as lovingly as such sacred promises are, given for the sake of true liking, love and affection. Were beauty under twenty locks kept fast, yet love breaks through and picks them all at last. Besides, does not love better what is best ? Had not Rustom broken the two locks, lock of race and lock of prejudice, which are stronger than those twenty ? And will not Magdalene's love better what was best in Rustom ? Had it not done so already ?

CHAPTER LI

MAGDALENE ON A MISSION

"He that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capacity and godlike reason
To fast in us unused."

SHAKESPEARE'S *Hamlet.*

WHERE did Magdalene go when the door of Rustom's lock-up was closed after her? Did she go home? Did she go a-shopping? Did she go on an errand to the Bahadurshahs or to the Meheloojis? No, she did nothing of the kind. She had two missions to perform at the jail. That with Rustom was over. The other lay with two other men. When she was out of Rustom's cell, her kinsman Mr. Macdermott took her to No. 4 cell. Magdalene entered it and was confronted with two Mahomedans who were squatting on a mattress spread on the ground. Each held his head down and each was buried in deep meditation. At the sight of Magdalene each started to his feet and salaamed low. Magdalene's face was not unfamiliar to them. They thought they had seen her before but where they could not remember.

The two men were the *sarangiwalla* and the *tabalchi*.

"My friends," she said, sitting herself on one of the two *charpois* which stood in the room and beckoning them to be seated on the other, "my friends, I have something to say to you, something of great importance, something which if you agree to will save you, save your souls and save a fellow-brother from the jaws of the gallows. It is true that the fellow-brother I speak of is not a follower of your Prophet; but in the eye of Allah it makes no difference."

" Friends, this is not the first time you are looking on me. You had seen me and I had the pleasure to see you and that dear departed lady Motidana whose loss we all so deplore at Mr. Mehelooji's Toddy-party. There, at the Toddy-party, that tree had taken an innocent man's life. There, at the *mujra*, foul play took another life, a life more important and more useful than that taken by the tree. The life of a third person is now in danger, a third person who is no less innocent. Who is that third person and where is he? He is not far from you; he is Rustom Delaver. He is the same man whom your wife, friend Muradkhan, liked, respected and admired; the same man to whom she gave her photo on the eve of her death; the same man who if my information be correct was her friend and secretary-in-chief. You know, Muradkhan, as well as I do, as well as this brother of ours does and above all as God does that Rustom is innocent. You are in a position to prove this and yet you will not do it—no, not even for the sake of the dear deceased. You will not do it, because you have been sworn by those who are really guilty not to do it; sworn not for your sake but for their own. The oath administered to you is nothing but a sin in the eye of Allah and of your Prophet. It is as false as the word of your Prophet is true. To keep that oath is to break your Prophet's word. To break that oath will be to obey his commandments. The word of your Prophet is his *vasiyet* —his last will and testament. Like the testament of Christ its purport is ' Serve my people if you would serve me : To serve me you must suffer: They serve Him best who best bear His mild yoke : Their state is kingly.' Come, friends, I though a woman of another faith do not disdain to go down on my knees and to beseech you to tell the truth. Tell it at once and save a young and innocent heart from distress. Believe me, if you don't do it truth will not be concealed for ever. It is sure to shine out in the end and the crushers will then be the crushed "

The bosom of the two men so appealed to heaved. Their faces burnt with shame. Their frames shook, shook at the sight, shook at the action and shook at the words of that Christian saint in the garb of a woman. Sigh upon sigh escaped them. The *sarangi-walla* who was the senior man of the two held the *noor* of Allah, *i.e.*, the beard in his hand ; tears rose to his eyes ; he slapped his forehead, slapped his cheeks and pinched his own ears in rapid succession, each time repeating *Tobah* ! *Tobah* ! till he could contain himself no more.

" Rise, sister, rise," he said, taking her by the hand and helping her to do so. " Rise, it hardly befits a true follower to see such a one as you kneeling before him. Rise and tell me what you would wish us to do. Speak and we will obey ; for art thou not an angel ? And dost thou not remind me of her who has flown from me ? " All this time the *tabalchi* had crouched down on the *chatai*, buried his face in his hands and was whimpering like a child.

" Friends," said Magdalene, " I am glad you have seen the error of your ways. See, here is our friend Mr. Macdermott. He is as much your friend as I. Tell us both all you know about the alleged murder. Conceal not a word if you would save your souls."

* * o

When Magdalene left she was greatly relieved. Her mission was fulfilled. She felt content as she had helped to save her lover who was innocent and had saved two other souls who were also innocent but were hovering on the verge of guilt.

CHAPTER LII

RUSI'S SOLITUDE

"*In these deep solitudes and awful cells*
Where heavenly-pensive Contemplation dwells."

POPE.

WHEN Magdalene left the prison Rustom was with solitude again. He was lonely before ; but he was more so now, now that Magdalene had come and gone like a meteor in the skies. Not to get a long-hoped-for thing is said to be better than getting and losing it in a trice. Magdalene was with Rustom for full thirty minutes. The thirty minutes seemed to have flown like thirty seconds, during which he had got, loved and lost Magdalene. Would he ever be free, free from prison, free to do as he liked and above all free to marry Magdalene ? Were not the barriers between her and him insurmountable ? Did not defiance of those barriers mean persecution at the hands of the purblind ? What cared he for persecution, if he could be but free ? Was all that she told him about his innocence and his liberation true ? Was he really innocent ? At times he thought he was and at times he thought he was not. This is what his troubles and his solitude had brought him to. It was a sad pass to come to but not an uncommon one under the circumstances. His solitude was not unbroken. It was invaded sometimes by the police, sometimes by his Counsels and sometimes by Bahadurshah and Mehelooji. Bahadurshah had told his daughter Shirin that likely enough the softening influence of a partner in life would improve Rustom. The partner had come seeking Rustom as it were and had left behind her traces of her great influence—traces

which had already commenced to work Rustom's weal.

After pleasure there is pain and after pain there is pleasure. He did not know whether he should be pleased or sorry. What if he should be free from prison and yet unable to marry Magdalene? In that case would it not have been well for him if he had not obtained the promise from her? He was like a man in a wilderness. He had made his own solitude and had just commenced to call it his peace, when the peace was broken. If his society had taught him how to live his own life, his solitude had taught him how to suffer and how to die. He was prepared to die before Magdalene had come in. He was not prepared to do it now. But even in contrasts there is pleasure. It is from dissipation that we learn to enjoy solitude and it is from solitude that we like to go back to dissipation. If Rustom had not actually led a dissipated life, it surely was not a strict or a good one. But on one point he was now resolute. He would not court dissipation again. He would pay court to Magdalene and marry her. We are said to dream in courtship. For Rustom that dream was a welcome one for it served to take his mind away from the court of law and all the horrors conjured up by it to the court of love and its concomitants, joy and pleasure.

The word love is very lovely, lovely to look at on paper and lovely to hear. But is it really so lovely after all? Do not passions and lust look like love? And are they not mistaken for it? Has it not always left us in doubt as to its beginning and its end? It has very often no beginning or existence where it is supposed to have it and no end where it is supposed to have one. To every hundred men who have walked in wedlock there are one or two only whose dream in courtship has come true. Love has often come after wedlock where there was no courtship; whereas love before marriage has often brought but hatred after it. Rustom and Magdalene's contemplated alliance was but the result of two long-latent forces, common virtues, or

qualities and friendship, real friendship based on long acquaintance and mutual approval of the qualities. If these can constitute love there was love between Rustom and Magdalene. A Persian poet has aptly sung that the *bulbul* (nightingale) wags its tongue in the honey of sweet fancies at the sight of a flower. But the kindly face of God's great love, says the poet, deprives the beholder *bulbul* of its tongue. If we comprehend this, we comprehend all about love.

CHAPTER LIII

DISTANT VIEWS OF HAPPINESS : DO DREAMS HELP THEM ?

" The bitter goes before the sweet. Yea, and for as much as is doth, it makes the sweet the sweeter."

BUNYAN'S *Pilgrim's Progress.*

THRITI was now comparatively happy for she was now inured to her fate and used to her darkness. The absence of light was compensated for by the light of love and by the promised light of happiness, happiness in union with the man whom she had seen when seeing, met when not seeing and seen in her dreams just as a person with eyes does. The blind when awake are not blind when asleep. A dream would not be a dream had it not the power to make a person see when under the spell of its influence. Whatever it may be to those that see, it is nothing but a happy consummation to the blind ; for it is an unusual delight to be able to see even in sleep.

When she was a child, Thriti's mother had told her that dreams are but interludes which fancy makes and whereas hundreds of them may come untrue, a single one of them may come true. The untrue dreams, she had said, are but the children of idle brains and are mere phantasies. The true dream is the precursor of coming calamity or happiness.

Thriti's blindness had not embittered her feelings or disturbed the even tenor of the milk of human kindness in her. She had seen Rustom in the prison. She had told him that she believed him to be innocent and that she felt sure he would be acquitted. Motidana's death she regretted. The thought often invaded her mind that had not the man Ramla ascended the Toddy tree she would not have gone blind. But she dismissed the idea soon as it entered her

mind. There was no tinge of bitterness left in her by that event and she visited Ramla's family who were not far from her now.

There was also another who being a cousin was like a sister to her, another who though not taking part in her happiness when on the path of unrighteousness would surely have shared it when on the path of virtue. That one was Shera. Alas for her and for Thriti, her kindly eye that was to be, had closed for ever. The accusing spirit, which had flown up to Heaven's chancery with the oath, blushed as he gave it in; and the recording angel as he wrote it down dropped a tear upon the word and blotted it out for ever. Even thus was Shera's record of sins blotted out before her *Feroher* or guiding spirit flew up there.

The sympathy of a person, especially of a relative long alienated comes as a wholesome salve to the wounded. Just when the cup of this sympathy was at her lips it overturned and she missed it for ever. She thought Shera was looking down on her lovingly now.

The Zorastrian religion lays down that the *Ferohers* not only remember but visit the minds of those who remember and think of them. Even so it was with Thriti. Shera was never absent from her thoughts and she had remembered her in her prayers. Only the day before, Roshan had told her that she had seen Shera in her dream ; she had looked and smiled at Roshan. Thriti had then made light of the matter. Roshan, she thought, had perhaps overfed herself. But things were different now. Thriti had the same visitation, even a stronger one, and she was not inclined to doubt it. On the contrary she had welcomed it and had felt considerably relieved and reassured.

Seated in her room to-day Thriti was thinking of this, when who should come in but Roshan herself. Roshan was now always by her side ; Roshan who was the representative of departed Shera ; Roshan who had by this time openly plighted her faith with her father's consent and pledged her troth to Thriti's only brother Jal and thereby more tightly sealed the bond of sisterhood.

Thriti since she took up her abode at the *bungli* and was betrothed to Jamshed did not go to the Bahadurshahs. It was Silla that saw her daily for her tuitions. And it was Silla that came in at that moment and rushed into Thriti's arms. Roshan was unusually animated. She had run right from Mehelooji's bungalow and burst upon Thriti like a little meteor from the skies. She had something very unusual and important to convey. Thriti's face denoted curiosity.

"Thriti," said Roshan, "what are you at? You look quite like a female *philsuf* (philosopher)! Where's that naughty man Jal?"

"The naughty man that is to be your husband!" queried Thriti. "Didn't you tell me, Roshan, that Shera told you in your dream that she approved of the match and blessed you both?"

"She told me that. But she did not tell me that you and I should be constantly at it and be thinking of nothing else. Just think, Thriti, it was after all a dream. I must have overfed myself," taunted the naughty man's little fiancée.

Just then the naughty man put in his appearance.

"Wifie, where were you so long? Aren't you my wifie now? Didn't I tell you years ago that I would make you my wifie in spite of a hundred mother Meherbanoos of yours, in spite of dear Shera's protests and that rascal Erach's rascalities?"

"But I am not your wifie yet. You have to wait until you are out of college. Wait till you can earn and maintain a wife."

"And that will not be long," replied the naughty man, taking hold of the wifie and doing something that seemed very naughty.

"Goodness!" said Thriti, "but what is it that you wanted to tell me, Roshan? Love is so naughty and makes us all so forgetful."

"O Thriti, O Jal, guess, just guess what I have come to communicate, guess and run, run and make merry. Candida, come and take charge of the door. We are all going—"

"Mad over marriage dreams," said a man's voice behind. It was Ardeshir. "What are you doing here, girls? They are all

waiting there, Rustom included. He was for leaving ; but I have forced him to stay a little longer."

"Rustom ?" shouted Thriti.

"Rusi ?" shouted Jal.

"O Papa, why did you not hasten to tell us that ? Roshan has been so slow at it," observed Thriti. She and Jal had now taken to calling Ardeshir Papa.

At the mention of Rustom's name Shirin became thoughtful at once. She seemed to blame herself for quietly standing by and not questioning Roshan as to what she had to communicate.

"I wanted to ask, Ardeshirji," she said, "but these—"

"Love-sick people would not allow you to do it," finished Ardeshir. They all laughed at this except Shirin for wasn't she love-sick herself ? The more so, because she did not know it. The more so, because the man for whom she entertained that peculiar feeling was entirely unaware of it ? Would she ever tell Rusi that she loved him ? Would Rusi ever tell her that he loved her ? No ; for he had never thought of her in that light. His thoughts were with another. That another was Magdalene. Would Shirin divine her own feelings when she comes to know that Rustom was already another's ? Oh ! What tortures would that be ?

"Rustom is free, thank God," said Ardeshir, when Thriti rose to change her *sari*. "It could not have been otherwise. We are all so glad and yet so sorry."

"Sorry ! Why ?" unconsciously ejaculated Shirin.

"Yes," sorry," said Ardeshir, "sorry because early next week he is to leave us."

"Leave us !" enquired Shirin musingly.

"Yes," said Ardeshir, "leave us for a good long while to come. He is sailing for America. Come, Thriti, it's getting late ; we must be going to the bungalow."

They all filed out in a row joyfully ; Shirin alone followed in the wake mournfully.

CHAPTER LIV

JUSTICE VINDICATED

" The evil, soon
Driven back, redounded as a flood on those
From whom it sprung,"

SO Rustom was set at liberty. Was he? Yes, he was. Otherwise he could not have been at Mehelooji's to-day. Otherwise Happy Home could not have been the happy home it was to-day. Otherwise the gay concourse would not have issued in procession from Thriti's *bungli* and made their way to the main bungalow as we saw in the last chapter.

Rustom had come out of the jail only last evening. Mehelooji would fain have brought him over to Happy Home. But Chandan would not hear of it. The day and the hour were to her feminine mind unsuited to the occasion. The next day, she thought, would be more auspicious. He was her own darling and the darling must be brought home with due eclat like the conquering hero coming home. So Rustom spent the night at the chummery, where he was no less welcome.

Rustom was placed before the Magistrate the previous day. The accusers were also there. Mr. Macdermott stated that all through the interval granted by the Magistrate the police was busy instituting inquiries and he was glad to say that they were able to complete them in a way as to leave no doubt whatever both as to the cause of Motidana's death and as to those who had caused it. He went on to say that he would briefly recapitulate the nature of the police investigations and the result thereof. He was delighted to observe that both the investigations and the results had tended

to completely exonerate Mr. Rustom Delaver not only from the accusation of murder brought against him but from the slightest particle of complicity in the mysterious doings of that night. It had put his innocence beyond pale of doubt. The case had disclosed a curious phase in the history of crime, a phase which though very rare is not altogether uncommon, a phase which had worked its own curious evolution and developments. Its main feature lay in the fact that the police were satisfied that the accusers, and not the accused, were the guilty party.

On the night on which Motidana died, continued the Superintendent, she had held a *Mujra* at her house. Amongst those present were Rustom Delaver, the four accusers and Rustom's friends—Cowasshaw and Darabshaw. Rustom was the hero of the day, in as much as it was his cap that had graced the singer's head as *mujra*-cap and it was his handkerchief that was selected for the *bansli* performance by the singer. In the eyes of the singing world it was not an ordinary honour ; for Motidana was not an ordinary singer. His Worship must have seen this from the graphic accounts of her fame and career which had appeared and still continued to appear from time to time in the newspapers. They vied as it were with one another for greater accuracy and fuller details. *Mujras,* said the Superintendent, are private concerts ; but like public concerts the audiences they attract are mixed ones. Amongst a number of good there are often some bad characters. Motidana had tried to purge her gatherings of this element ; but like most singers she had found that it could not be done effectually. The favour which Mr. Rustom Delaver had invariably found with the singer had made him many enemies, the principal amongst them being Tore-i-bajkhan, Yarkhan, Rangnath and Balvantrao. These men were present at the *Mujra*, which was to see the last of Motidana. Rustom's growing popularity was odious to them. All their efforts to undermine him in the favour of the singer had been unavailing. They also hated Motidana ; for

they knew she was aware of their ways and had kept them always at arm's length. Revenge to such men is always sweet. So they resolved to revenge themselves on both Motidana and Rustom. The special marks of favour which Mr. Rustom had received from the singer on that particular night had but added fuel to fire. They were tortures to the four men and tended to accelerate action. Without knowing what they were going to do they took the *tabalchi* in hand and persuaded him to accommodate them in his room for the remainder of the night. The police enquiries went to show that both the *sarangiwalla* and the *tabalchi* were good and true men. When in the *tabalchi's* room, and before the *sarangiwalla* went there as usual to offer up prayers with his friend, the four men had laid their heads together and formed a hasty plan. They would murder Motidana and pose Rustom as the murderer. They must have witnesses ; at least two, who must be persons of Motidana's household. Murtuja fell an easy prey. They wanted a knife ; and she gave them the one which her mistress had purchased only four days ago. The *tabalchi* was a hard nut to crack. But he was not an angel ; and he fell also. The four men had taken good care to drug him, without which it is doubtful if he had fallen. But even when so drugged he would not agree to have anything to do with their plan of action. All he promised was that he would hold his peace. When the *sarangiwalla* came down he was given a *hookah*, which he had smoked under great pressure. He was so far inebriate that he had only a hazy notion of what was passing around him. When sober he remembered that he was offered a substantial bribe to promise as the *tabalchi* had done. He was a pious man and a true Mahomedan. Besides he was Motidana's husband—Motidana who was so kind to him. The four men were wily and wary. They had given him an oath that if he did not agree to do what they asked him to do he would under no circumstances divulge their secret. The *sarangiwalla* had tottered back to his room in a daze. Both Mr. Rustom and he had spent

a troubled night, with this difference that whilst Mr. Rustom lay awake Muradkhan had drowsy slumbers. Rustom had caught him muttering and murmuring. After describing the nature of these mutterings and murmurings, which were a sort of sleepy confession and which the reader has read before, the Superintendent went on to other matters.

After midnight the four men and the *tabalchi* left their room on the ground floor and went upto the kitchen where they found Murtuja up and ready to meet them. From thence they came to the door of Motidana's room and resolved to lie in wait there till chance or good luck could lead them onward on the pathway of crime. They were hardened sinners, said the Superintendent, and were not above stooping to anything and everything. As often happens both chance and luck did favour them. "Such luck as no good man would seek or envy," remarked His Worship. In a few minutes they heard first a movement and then footsteps moving in Motidana's room. There were then more sounds as if of the unlocking and throwing open of a door. It was the self-same door that intervened between Motidana's private apartment and the *Mujra* room. An examination of her bed by the Police the next day had shown conclusively that it was not slept in that night at all. Motidana must have set up all night buried in meditation ; for her body was found dressed just the same as for the *Mujra*. An off-duty police official who was at the *Mujra* had testified to this. The *tabalchi* had confessed that leaving the room Motidana was making her way to the iron rocking chair in the *Mujra* room. Before she was half way to it she had stopped and had laid both her hands on her breast as if she were in sudden and severe pain. The pain must have been very severe indeed ; for there were contortions on her face which was clouded. A double-wick lamp was alight and throwing its light on her face. In a minute or two she had essayed to move, but had only ended in falling face forward. There was a heavy thud, a groan or two and all had

seemed to be over. The *tabalchi* had said that he could not help giving out a loud yell; but he was overpowered by the four men who threatened to put their knife into him if he were not quiet. They reminded him of his oath and threatened to kill him if he ever broke it. The men had then gone back to where Motidana lay and held a short consultation. Tore-i-bajkhan and Rangnath pronounced that she was quite dead. Yarkhan and Balvantrao said that it was only a swoon from which she might wake at any time. They had gone too far to retreat. To make assurance doubly sure, Yarkhan suggested that the knife which was ready at hand should be brought into requisition. The question was who should do it. And at last it was Yarkhan that did it. They assured themselves that the knife had gone sufficiently deep. It was new and sharp and could not have failed to do its work. Those were overwrought moments even for sinners, so overwrought that they took no count of the blood-bespattered carpet and their own outer garments which were also spotted with blood until Murtuja drew their attention to it. They took off the outer garments and concealed them under the carpet. They were pleased to see that the inner ones that formed their dirty day-wear were not soiled. "Men of this class, Your Worship," said the Superintendent, in reply to the Magistrate's inquiry, "do not care to change their clothes when they go out dining or holiday-making. They only slip on the new ones over the old." Their next step was to make for the doorway and see where Rustom was. Satan himself seemed to be at their elbow on this occasion also for it was at this moment that Rustom who had evil forebodings and presentiments and who had felt anxious about Motidana all night showed himself at that very door. This was all that the sinners wanted. The Superintendent then related all the occurrences in the *Mujra* room, of which the reader is already aware. He did not miss a single detail of the preliminary inquiry and investigation, which were conducted by the Deputy Commissioner himself. He went on to say that but for the accusation

that was brought against Mr. Rustom, they would never have dreamt of apprehending him.

At the Superintendent's suggestion Rustom described to the Magistrate all that had passed between Motidana and himself after the *Mujra* was over. The photo with the inscription in Motidana's hand was inspected by the Magistrate. Mr. Macdermott then said that at certain stages of the enquiry it had seemed to the police that the fates were against Rustom. His lawyer could not help advising him to reserve his defence. There were Darabshaw and Cowasshaw, who were at the *Mujra* till the end and could only depose as to what had transpired there and to nothing further. All that they could testify were the extremely good relations and mutual goodwill between the deceased and Mr. Rustom and the ill-feeling that had existed between him and the accusers. They could also testify to the high words that had passed between Rustom and his accusers on that eventful night; but beyond that they could not go. The greatest impediment, said the Superintendent, in their way was the obduracy of the *sarangi-walla* and the *tabalchi*. They had a great deal to say but their oaths stood in the way. If they had not yielded the only course open to the police would have been to let Rustom take his trial at the Sessions and if the court found him not guilty then to charge his accusers with murder and false accusation. But if there be hope for sinners surely there must be hope for the sinned-against or innocent. Before justice Heaven itself would not allow the innocent to suffer; Heaven had sent an angel in the form of a Scottish maiden to help Mr. Rustom. Her family was long acquainted with the Meheloojis and Mr. Rustom; and when on a visit to him in jail she had made up her mind to interview Murad-khan and the *tabalchi*. They had yielded to her intercession and confessed everything to him, Mr. Macdermott, who had taken down their statements in Miss Macgregor's presence. "The best thanks of the police are due to that young lady," said the Superin-

tendent, pointing to where Magdalene was seated. For the moment she was the cynosure of all eyes, the centre of admiration and attraction, which reached the climax when the Magistrate complimented her on her behaviour. His Worship ended by saying that he considered Mr. Rustom very lucky for having secured the services of such a champion. Mr. Macdermott then said he hoped he had proved to His Worship's satisfaction that Mr. Rustom was entirely innocent of the accusation brought against him and he would pray to His Worship to release him. If His Worship agreed, the police would then formally charge Tore-i-bajkhan, Yarkhan, Rangnath and Balvantrao with having on that eventful night caused or done certain things with the intention to cause the death of Motidana. It would then be for His Worship to decide if the *sarangiwalla* and the *tabalchi* should be charged with aiding and abetting in the crime. The police had shown that they had no intention to sin and would in no way have directly or indirectly helped the sinners if they had not been drugged. They had made a clean breast of the whole affair and thus had facilitated the work of the police. As regards Murtuja she was a mere tool in the hands of the accusers but she must be tried at the Sessions.

The Magistrate observed that he entirely agreed with the Superintendent, but before he could commit the parties to the Sessions he would ask them if they had anything to say as to why they should not be so committed. Rangnath who was an educated man that had taken to bad ways stepped forward and said that he had consulted his friends and that they had decided to say nothing before the Magistrate.

Mr. Rustom Delaver was accordingly released on condition that he should not leave Bombay until the trial of the accused at the Sessions had ended for he would be an important witness in the case. Muradkhan and the *tabalchi* were released on heavy bails on their own credentials and on those of Mr. Macleod, solicitor, and Mr. Mehelooji. Luckily for the accused the Sessions

were sitting in a couple of days. The number of cases committed was very small and Rustom was told that he would have to be in Bombay at the most for a fortnight, after which period he would be free to go where he pleased.

All's well that ends well ! And it ended but extremely well for Rustom. And still more so for his ministering angel Magdalene, who refused to believe she could be so happy.

The case came on before the Session Judge in less than a week. The question that cornered the jury was, was it a murder ? There was the report of the Police Surgeon, there was the verdict of the Coroner's jury and there was the police investigation. They all pointed very strongly to the deceased having died of cramps in the chest, which had ended in a fall and caused a severe concussion and a wound in the head accompanied by a copious flow of blood. Murtuja whom penitence had overtaken confessed to her complicity in the affair. She had stood by many a bedside and ventured to say that her *Baisaheb* was quite dead before the knife was put into her back. Both she and the family doctor of the deceased had stated that heart-disease had set in and that the deceased was subject to occasional cramps in the chest. The Doctor was of opinion that they were such as to cause death at any time. This opinion, if anything, strongly supported that which was formed by the Police Surgeon. But all this, His Lordship said, could not exonerate the accused. The proceedings in the court and the evidence left no doubt in His Lordship's mind that the accused were inspired with a strong desire to do very serious hurt and harm to Motidana and to Rustom Delaver. This desire took the form of intention, which had a strong motive behind it. If the accused could have gained their object by lesser means than actual murder perhaps they would have been satisfied. It depended on circumstances and it was circumstances that had led them on. There was a division of opinion amongst them ; for whereas two of them thought Motidana was quite dead, the other two were of a different opinion. They ultimately decided to cause

death if it had not already occurred. Thereupon Yarkhan had put the knife into her. The intensity of this crime is increased when it is considered that the accused had charged an innocent man with the crime of their own commission. To do this they had perjured three persons: two very simple-hearted but honourable Mahomedans and the third a trusted old female servant of the deceased. The fact, if it were a fact, that Motidana had met her death through other causes before the knife was put into her in no way lessened the intensity of their offence. It was not the less heinous. This was not besides the first offence of the accused. The court had been convinced that they were old associates in crime and were more than once in jail. The court, however, wished to temper justice with mercy. It therefore directed that Yarkhan be transported to penal servitude for life and to spend the remainder of his earthly existence at the Andamans. It further directed that Tore-i-bajkhan, Rangnath and Balvantrao be each made to undergo rigorous imprisonment for a term of seven years. In the case of Murtuja, the court thought that the ends of justice would be vindicated if she suffered simple imprisonment for a period of six months. The *sarangiwalla* and the *tabalchi* were set at liberty.

CHAPTER LV

THE JEST OF FATE BEGINS

" Loving goes by haps ;
Some cupid kills with arrows, some with traps."

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN the procession which we have seen issuing from the small *bungli* arrived at the portals of the main bungalow, it stood for a moment transfixed to the spot in mute amazement. Was it the house they had started for or had they missed their way ? They gazed at one another and each looked for enlightenment in the eye of the other. The whole aspect of the house seemed to be transformed. It seemed as if the mother earth had suddenly swallowed up her masonry birth and shooted up a palace in its stead. It was all gloss, glimmer and shine. The glass panes, the window shutters, the doors and the outward decorations and designs were clean washed. The walls had undergone fresh coatings of paint and whitewash. The edifice, if it could be so called, which combined grandeur and simplicity with elegance, was in holiday attire inside and out ; for it was a gala-day with the inmates who were in high glee. The procession moved on and moved in. They saw many and they fell in and mixed with them amidst the speaking and unspeaking ' welcome '. The speaking ' welcome ' were the family and their friends of which there was a pretty concourse. The unspeaking ' welcome ' were Mehelooji's favourite cardboards and corner plates bearing that word in various hues and wordings and which were on this occasion carefully bedecked and garlanded with flowers. The crafty hands of the host and hostess and the battalion of servants and dependants were in evidence everywhere. It was all stir and commotion. A ceremony was being performed, a

ceremony very ordinary and not much noticeable at ordinary times but somewhat extraordinary and specially noticeable on this occasion. There was Mrs. Bahadurshah, there was Mrs. Mehelooji and there were two other figures one of a male and the other of a female. Mrs. Bahadurshah was holding a small silver tray in her hand which contained the ceremony materials peculiar to a betrothal. There was Magdalene, dressed *cap-a-pie* in Parsi costume, standing on a low wooden stand with her face towards the east. Mrs. Mehelooji was seen to take a pinch of '*kankoo*' or red paste from a small silver crucible which stood on the tray in Mrs. Bahadurshah's hands. She made a long straight mark with it on Magdalene's forehead in accordance with the time-honoured custom borrowed by the Parsis from the Hindus. She then took a bit of rice from the same tray and stuck it carefully on to the red paste. This done she carefully wound a beautiful garland of flowers round the young lady's neck and put a new full-blown cocoanut, which also bore small applications of the auspicious red paste, together with a substantial money present into her hands. Mrs. Mehelooji then lifted her hands and made a quaint pass therewith over Magdalene's temples. This was followed by a cracking of the finger knuckles which is a symbol of good fortune among the female population of India and which means practically the plucking out of the evil eye and the workings of *Ahriman* and consigning them to the winds. This ceremony over, Magdalene bent low and made an obeisance to the performers of the ceremony. It was all as graceful and as pretty and dignified as it could be. She then came down from her stand and with the auspices and tokens of good omens still in her hands she went up to Mehelooji and received his blessings. It was Rusi's turn next. Times were when he had laughed and railed at these ceremonious doings of the female doers even at the risk of hurting their feelings. The humorous and the ludicrous were then predominant in him. This spirit was not dead within him now but do what he could he could not display it on this

occasion. He looked serious and grave. Those round him attributed it to the fearful trials through which he had so lately passed. But it was not so. Something undefinable was working within him : some indescribable and nervous feeling ; some uncontrollable shakings of the heart ; the cause of which he could not divine. How was it all going to end, he thought ? He was going to marry a *Juddin*—no, that is not the word—to his mind it was a word which no good man or woman had any right to use. Pure and simple a *Juddin* means a man, woman or child of another community. Taking the meaning to be such, a Mahomedan or a Hindu has as much right to call the most orthodox Parsi a *Juddin*, as that Parsi pillar of orthodoxy has to call a Hindu or a Mahomedan so. To Rustom's mind '*Juddin*' was a most contemptuous term. He dubbed it a revolt against God, revolt against Zoraster and revolt against the very essence, the very spirit and the most aromatic flavour of Zorastrianism.

So Rusi could not read his own heart. He was not afraid of his community or of their communal doings which were mostly desperate for they aimed not at the life but at the death of the community and all that is communal or Zorastrian. There was, however, a kind of lurking fear within him—a fear which hinted at something fearful in the future. He was not a fatalist ; no, not the slightest bit ; but he had read about the jest of Fate and much about the little or large freaks of that freakish deity which is called God or Goddess for it trifles like a man and plays tricks like a woman. Rusi was roused out of his rueful study by a gentle voice behind. "Come, Rusi dear, please get on to the stand ! There's a good boy ! " The voice was that of his sister Chandan whose face at that minute was beaming on him like the face of the full moon. Rusi never forgot the mint of tender commiseration, sympathy, devotion and whole-heartedness which it conveyed. As if afraid lest Rusi should not obey, another voice took up the cue and said, "No, Rustom, we will accept no refusal from you. We are determined to

exact obedience." It was Mrs. Bahadurshah. Rusi obeyed mechanically. Ceremonies akin to those performed in the case of Magdalene were gone through with Rustom. To the male mind the idea of any one going patiently and seriously through such a ceremony is ludicrous. The male guests are bent on a spree on such occasions for were they not laughed at when they had gone through the same infliction in their days. Some of them came forward and added a small or large *kankoo chandla* or the red mark with the rice decoration by the side of that made by Chandan on Rusi's forehead. Rusi's hands were full of presents. At ordinary times the sight of some one else going through such a ceremony would have raised up all the mirth and merriment within him and set him a-talking and a-laughing. But his heart was too full for all these, and for words now. Magdalene has stolen his heart ; how could she have stolen his tongue, mused the crowd. No ! She had not done that. It was one of those events which happen in most men's and in most women's lives—an event which holds sway over the human heart and before which all human wishes are helpless. Congratulations and good wishes poured in amain upon the pair. Long life and prosperity were being heartily wished when lo ! suppressed sounds of some one sobbing and breathing with difficulty, of some one in mental or bodily trouble were heard emanating from the next room. Who could it be ? They all made a rush in the direction from which the sounds came. Magdalene and Rustom were not slow to follow. There was Shirin lying on a small sofa and holding a kerchief before her eyes to check the tears that were flowing freely and running down her cheeks and to conceal her face from prying eyes. Magdalene made straight towards her. What is it, my dear, she asked, where were you all this while ; you have not been absent from my mind for a moment. When they were killing me with kindness I was pressing them with questions as to where you were. Come, tell me, Silla, I doubt not but your heart is too full for words. These are tears of joy for you must be overjoyed at

our union. I should have told you all about it a week ago but I was not free to do so.

No answer came from the expected quarter. The speaker did not know the stabs that she was planting in her listener's heart. If anything, her speech tended to clear up certain things—things which were hitherto shrouded in a gloom—things which Silla had tried to understand but could not. At Magdalene's words a new light broke in upon her. She, Silla, now realized that she was in love with Rustom. She had been near enough the man, had mixed with him, ran foot races with him, sang with him, ate with him and romped with him long enough, perhaps longer than Magdalene had done. He had never told her or led her to believe that she was his sweetheart, even in joke, though he had spoken of Magdalene often enough in that light. Silla's breast heaved high and her sobs became louder and more audible in proportion. She concealed her face in her hands and her whole frame shook. The girl was in hysterics. Under the advice of a young doctor who was one of the gathering, the room was at once cleared, the windows were thrown open and Silla was conveyed to a comfortable bed near them. Mr. and Mrs. Bahadurshah regretted and blamed each other for having allowed the girl to be there. Bahadurshah whispered to his better half that he knew all that was at work within the girl but as she did not know it herself he had believed that her presence at the betrothal would not harm her. In a little while Silla was herself again. She rose, washed her face and expressed a desire to be taken home. She made light of the occurrence saying the gathering and the heat had overpowered her. She congratulated Magdalene who embraced her. Magdalene inquired mildly what had come over her. "There is something on your mind, Silla," she said. "Come! will you not tell it to me? Am I not your sister?" The Silla so addressed only shook her head and kept silent. There was so much pathos and so much melancholy in this quiet grief of the girl that it could not fail to touch Magdalene. Womenlike they threw

their hands round each other's neck and mingled their tears. This relieved them both. "Magdalene," said Silla, "I am really very silly, very naughty, very everything that you can possibly say, but I am my father's daughter and I shall now make it a point to know how to behave." Then seeing Rustom approach them she held out her hand to him. "Mr. Rustom," she said, "you are very lucky. You have got one who is more fitted to be your wife than any other girl in the world. She will keep you well in hand and—."

"'And ride on me and drive me so well as to keep me from going astray'; that's what you would say. Is it not so, Shirin?" said Rustom.

Thus it was that the jest of Fate had begun. Fate's favourite for the time being was Magdalene. Its jest or its victim for the time being was Silla. But Fate never is a friend or a foe to any one interminably. Fate has begun its work in this way and we must wait and see how the work works and ends its workings.

The party then retired to the repast room where stood a table loaded with plates and cups and all that could tempt and satiate. They all sat down to it including the Bahadurshahs and discussed the viands. Mild wines and Toddy were circulated but even with these there was an absence of that vivacity which usually distinguished the party and made it so vivacious. The repast over, they all returned to the drawing-room. There was the grand piano—the pride of the proprietor who was a man of music; there was the *dilruba;* there was a century old violin; there was a cabinet gramophone, a *sitar* and a mandoline and in short there was everything that is near and dear to the heart of a musician and that can please those who excel in music or have a right to call themselves experts. An impromptu *soiree* was proposed. Some were for *dilruba* and the *tabla*; others for the piano, violin and drum and some for the gramophone. But the Bahadurshahs were unwilling to sit it all out. Their mind was far away. Their daughter was their life and light. They would give up their lives to save hers, give up a limb to save injury

to one of hers. So they left carrying relief with themselves and leaving but regret behind. A sort of a damper fell on the party. Unconsciously they divided into groups ; some turning over books ; some over the albums ; some twanging away absent-mindedly at the violin strings ; some humming a low tune ; one moodily playing at the piano keys and another slowly running her fingers over those of the organ as if taking her first lesson in music. What was this ? It is a strange feeling ; as strange as it is uncontrollable but surely not unknown. It is a feeling which not unusually takes possession of us when a dear relative or a close friend is suddenly called away by a telegram or a hasty epistle from a party or performance or when we have gone out for airing or for a long or a short change. The Bahadurshahs did not leave because they were called away. What was it then again ? Why were the ladies more gloomy ? Why were their faces more solemn than those of the males ? It was because they were ladies and because they were awe-struck. We who call ourselves educated, advanced, civilized, are not unacquainted with such a feeling. We try to keep it at arms length and yet fail to free ourselves from it. The falling down of a chandelier or an ornamental lamp attached to a ceiling, the overturning and breaking of an ornamental piece, a handsome fish bowl or a flower vase, news of the overturning of a family carriage or even the crashing noise of a dinner set on such auspicious occasions as a friendly gathering, a dinner party and more particularly a betrothal or a wedding has a special or an unique significance of its own. None of these events had luckily occurred during Rustom's betrothal but there was the low crying, the sighs and the sobbing. The doctors set it down to the credit of hysteria as was quite true and natural. The males said it was all nonsense setting it down to anything else. But to the mind of the ladies it boded ill. There should be no crying and even hysteria they think has no right to display itself on such occasions. Besides, when was the girl ever hysterical, they asked. And what reason had she

to be hysterical then ? The surroundings and the circumstances, they said, were more in favour of music and merriment than an hysterical exhibition. Even some of the sterner sex caught the contagion and lapsed into silence. Magdalene and Rusi taking advantage of this hied away and betook themselves to a fernary in the garden. A sort of an *extempore* concert was got up and the party dispersed earlier than expected.

An hour later Mehelooji was at the telephone somewhat snappishly and excitedly ringing away for Mr. Bahadurshah. The girl operator at the exchange strongly objected to his behaviour and warned him not to ring so hard. This made the usually passive Mr. Mehelooji more active and she offered resistance. He thrice gave wrong numbers and when he gave the right one the operator whoever she was pronounced the word " engaged " by way of retaliation. Where the telephone is concerned even purse-proud males have to be at the mercy of empty-purse girls. So it was with Mehelooji. He had to give up ringing in sheer despair and to leave the telephone.

Ten minutes later he returned to it much calmer and cooler than before and prayed for with a " please Madam " No. 2525. The Madam seemed to recognize the voice. There was an abrupt ' what now ' ; then a low chuckle ; then a tittering and then there was the number at Mr. Mehelooji's sole disposal and service. He enquired of Bahadurshah if everything was all right and how Shirin was and if they thought of keeping their promise to come to Happy Home to-morrow to talk about the pair and Rusi's departure to America. The replies were favourable and were duly conveyed to those who were waiting for them.

Mr. and Mrs. Bahadurshah were coming but Shirin was to stay behind.

CHAPTER LVI

PICKINGS BY THE WAY : MOTIDANA'S MUNIFICENCE

"*Honour and shame from no condition rise;*
Act well your part, there all the honour lies."

POPE'S *Essay on Man.*

WE would be ingrates if we do not turn to Motidana for the last time before we pass on to other events. Even in the most shady walks of life there is virtue at times. Virtue and vice walk hand in hand there and are fighting for supremacy. Even thus hath the poet said :

There is so much good in the worst of us
And so much bad in the best of us
That it hardly behoves any of us
To speak about the rest of us.

What though forced by circumstances to walk in the shady path of life, was not Motidana still virtuous ? It is for that, that she has been allowed to play such an active part on the stage of this story.

Motidana had left a Will the contents of which are worthy of being briefly chronicled. It was prepared by an English lawyer of great repute. Motidana was first English and then Mahomedan. The Will showed that she was worth over two lacs :—money, furniture, jewellery and houses included. She was a great economist and plain living and plain thinking were her motto. She never dressed in showy raiments except perforce during *Mujras* and had never succumbed to Fashion. She was an example, we must confess to our shame, to some of the Parsi women of the period who see nothing wrong in carrying their dress to the very verge of

undress and in exposing parts of their person to the eye of unvirtuous gazers of all castes, colour and creed. To her hearers and admirers Motidana was Ellen Terry. This was partly the secret of her accumulations. And this must also serve to clear the doubt in the reader's mind as to how a mere *Kanchani* can come by so much money.

In the Will she had left life competences to Rustom Delaver, John Macgregor, the *sarangiwalla*, the *tabalchi* and some of her close friends and relatives not forgetting the servants whom she thought to be faithful.

Her trustees and executors were Mehelooji, Bahadurshah, the *sarangiwalla*, Rustom, her solicitor Mr. Macleod and Mr. John Macgregor. The last mentioned gentleman was recommended to be a trustee by Mr. Macleod who knew that the trusteeship was not to be a barren one. It carried a gift of Rs. 5,000 to each of the trustees who were also to be the executors.

Her house in Mahomedan *mohla* was to be devoted for the purpose of a Mahomedan school ; that at Parel for a Christian school and that in her mother's birth-place for a free school for children of all denominations.

A donation of Rupees five thousand was given to the mosque in Mahomedan *mohla* and a like donation to the Christian church in Parel. Rupees twenty five thousand were to be laid out at interest for the allotment of prizes for the best essays on religion, economics, politics, philosophy, freedom of thought, freedom of action, race and religion, allegiance to the British *Raj* and such like subjects as the trustees may in their discretion decide upon. Two scholarships were to be established, one in her mother's name and another in that of her father ; so selfless was she. Though a Mahomedan, Motidana remembered that all religions were alike. She knew what Christian virtues were and how they should be exercised. She understood fully the force of true charity. The tablet over her grave was to bear the following inscription in

Urdu and in English:

HERE LIES
MOTIDANA
THE HUMBLE SERVANT OF
ALLAH AND HIS PROPHET
ALL THAT SHE CLAIMS FROM YOU FRIENDS IS A TEAR:
SHED IT IF YOU WILL.
SHE HAS DIED IN THE GLORY OF ALLAH
THIS————DAY OF————IN THE YEAR OF————,
WITH NO OTHER HOPE THAN THAT OF
ETERNAL PEACE
AND
HIS GREAT MERCY.

Such was the inscription. It spoke strongly of the will and testified to the noble mind and character of the deceased. It showed that she was neither a bigot nor a scoffer. It showed that she had lived, thought and acted according to the dictates of Mahomed and Christ and not the least of Zoraster, of whom she had heard and read a great deal laterly. Her life and her testamentary dispositions were an object-lesson, a book to learn much from, by the benighted Parsi of the present day. She it was that had laid *Manashni*, *Ghavashni* and *Kunashni* (Good thoughts, Good words and Good deeds) rightly to her heart and held them pre-eminently before us.

Unluckily for the present-day Parsi, they are divided into two ignoble classes, the bigot and the scoffer. The scoffer scoffs at all the larger issues and earnest influences of life. For him, the war, Indian politics, the Congress and public questions generally, are matters of a cynical or at best of a detached and academic discussion. The bigot is eternally engaged in the futile and ferocious task of running down all progress, all reform and all education, in the imaginary interest of religion and ancestral custom. Between them they make the community odious and ridiculous. Year in and year out, their controversies are of a

foolish and fanatical character. They centre round frivolties ; frivolties which could be best condemned by a contemptuous silence. The Parsi crowd is fast becoming notorious for indulging in a full-throated chorus of impotent howlings which render them ridiculous and serve merely to give a gratuitous advertisement to undesirable events. Sensational trifles are the only topics over which the Parsis seem capable of waxing enthusiastic *en masse*. In the review of past events in which our patriotic newspapers annually indulge, much space and much prominence are accorded to such indiscretions and to indiscriminate charities. They give rise to gloomy prognostications of a rapid disintegration and downfall of the community. In the same breath, with an amazing inconsistency, the same reviews, in a vein of self-satisfaction and self-laudation, sing hallelujah for the community's prosperity and superiority. The community, as a whole, has displayed a scandalous indifference to supreme political, moral, social, religious and educational questions, relating to its welfare which cry and call to it for close and careful consideration. No organised effort has been made to move with the times or to take advantage of the changing political conditions. The pioneers of the community, men of material worth and merit, who can pull the community out of the abyss of distraction and disgrace, are so taken up with their own material advancement and aggrandizement that they have elected to stand by and enjoy the fun.

Motidana, though only a *kanchani*, had willed away large sums in the interest of education. Look at the Parsis. They have made no effort to improve the standard, quality, or practical efficiency of the education of Parsi boys and girls. While the rival communities are establishing universities, the Parsis, with the lakhs that they spend in indiscriminate charities, have not as yet even established a public school for their own children on modern lines. They owe the ascendancy and the little political consequence which they possess, amid the myriads of India, entirely to their education and the enterprise displayed by their forebears in the past. In the events

which are taking place around us daily, there is immense scope for enterprise outside the borders of India. No earnest or organised effort is being made to rouse the community to the need of such enterprise. On the one hand they keep aloof from the movements which would identify them with India while on the other they refuse to look beyond the limits of India. In the days to come India will be for the Indians. The Parsis by their apathy and want of daily increasing enterprise will find themselves neither here nor there in the unfamiliar conditions of a renovated world.

There are two depressing factors in the life of the present-day Parsi. There is in the first place the narrow bigotry which leads him to exaggerate the significance of isolated instances of social aberration and ignore the movements that really matter. Secondly, there is the increasing fondness for a life of pleasure and sensuality and an artificial standard of living. His activities are confined within the limits of Bombay city and he is more in evidence in the places of amusement and gatherings made up by Tom-fools and Toadies than anywhere else. It is these tendencies that make his recent record so bare and tarnish his fair fame and name.

The three great elements of modern civilisation and progress are said to be gunpowder, printing and Protestant religion. What the Parsis need most is brave and undaunted Parsi Protestants, who would snatch Zorastrianism from the wily clutches of the Theosophist, the orthodox, the bigot and the scoffer and convert it into a true Parsi Protestant religion which would be really and truly restoring it to its pristine condition. Gunpowder they cannot use but the press they surely can.

The so called progressive men have combined into bodies known as the Zorastrian Conference and the Parsi Central Association. They only preach and do not practice. Money is their gunpowder. They have plenty of it but they would not spend so much as a farthing to advance the cause of higher education, social and religious reforms and culture on which they lay so much stress.

CHAPTER LVII

THE BLIND DOCTOR TO THE FORE AGAIN

" You that still have your sight—
Remember me !
I risked my life—I lost my eyes—
That you might see."

JOHN OXENHAM.

FEELING forlorn, lost in thought and leaning on the arm of my sorry guide I wended my way towards and crossed the gateway of Happy Home. The shades of evening were then falling fast and birds and beasts and flowers were preparing to retire for their nightly rest.

One there was of my own flesh and blood ; one to whom this humble volume has been dedicated in token of everlasting affection and gratitude ; who had helped me in my daily labours and hard toil ; who had ungrudgingly sacrificed some of his own comforts and willingly and readily attended to those of mine by taking me about fearlessly and firmly without ever thinking of what those inclined to cajole and cavil will say about it. His was a pleasant and entertaining company. It softened the sting of blindness. It took me out of myself and my thoughts for I had no time then to be alone with them. Things are different now. He of my flesh and blood is gone and those alone who knew the past can realize the loss and comprehend the full depth and gravity of the situation.

A pair of gentle delicate hands now ply me about wherever I go. They are not so strong but equally helpful. They are those of my dear wife who is now the sole prop and pillar of my life. She is the only sunbeam on the horizon of my darkness. She has nursed

me throughout my solitude and long and protracted illness and helped me to relieve the tedium of many a lingering hour. May God keep her so long as he may please to keep me and much longer.

What a digression, I again hear the reader murmur, and yet I do not ask him to excuse me for it. To digress does not necessarily mean to depart from the right track for ever and aye. Without digression there can be no diversification. We are all digressing daily, diversifying and dividing and making it up and uniting again in one common unit. It is like the seven colours that diversify all the face of nature. If excuse be needed for this sin of commission, I would say with Shakespeare,

"Thy abundant goodness shall excuse
This deadly blot on thy digressing Son."

Why I had come there I knew not. Whom I had come to see I had decided not. There were so many there in that vast compound of Happy Home, whom I knew and who knew me ; so many whom I liked and who liked me. To see one and not to see another was to offend that another. Like Solomon, therefore, I found shelter in wisdom and let my guide lead me where and whither he would. He chose to lead me to the little *bungli*, where were domiciled the girl with the lost sight, Thriti ; the girl full of heavenly light, Roshan ; the full grown man of mixed hilarity and hardship, Ardeshir, and Roshan's fiancé, the bright and hopeful young stripling, Jal. Our onward progress was soon checked by the sound of rising voices as merry and as gay as those of the lark and the linnet.

"Oh Jal, you naughty man, you are always for frightening me ; you are the pest of my life ; you have caused the book to fall from my hands ; see how far it has rolled away from me ; even thus I will roll away from you if you are not wiser !"—a fine girlish voice was heard to say this, half peevishly and petulantly and half in mirth and by way of complaining murmur. It was Roshan for the voice was unmistakably hers. There was only one other voice that resembled hers and that was the voice of our 'Silla the divine',—Shirin. The

two voices, when combined, were melody itself. But they were not combined now for Silla was not there. I could not see but I could well divine Roshan lying under a shade, outstretched at full length on a garden chair, outwardly deep down into a book but inwardly awaiting the arrival of her lover. I could well divine the lover issuing unawares from the cluster of toddy-trees behind, slyly pulling down the graceful *sor* of her *sari* and letting loose far below the long length of her slender neck and back the fullsome knot of her raven black glossy hair.

" O you naughty man, do you think I am more interested in you than in that book there ? What right have you to deprive me of that pleasure ? " rose the complaining voice high above the air once again.

" I have every right, madam, to pull that little nasal organ of yours, which we call nose, pinch those two rougish little organs of hearing which we call ears and to singe and tinge those beautiful glowing cheeks of yours by way of punishment, if I so choose." (Suggestive sounds conveyed to me that the speaker had actually put his threats into practice, for he had the right to do so.) "You are again reading those dirty love-stories of yours. Were Mr. B— here he would give you a lecture you will never forget. He very rightly says novels are you young ladies' Gospel ! I certainly think it is gospel truth."

" Jal, my boy you are right," said I pushing forward and standing out in sight of them. " What is that book the young defaulter has been reading ? "

" Oh ! It's only ' Love's Labour Lost '. The author is said to be an obscure one but all the same I assure you Mr. B— the book is highly entertaining." It was Roshan that said this. She did not evidently desire that her lover should have the chance of replying and prejudicing me against that popular edition of her favourite novel.

" Really ! " said I ; " and whose was the lost labour ? Was it

the lover's or was it the loved one's?"

"Oh!" said the girl. "It was certainly the lover that lost it."

"How?" asked I. "Did the sweetheart drown herself?"

"No."

"Was she killed under a motor-car?"

"No."

"Did she fly up and melt away in the air like those modern acrobats, the Theosophists?"

"No."

"Then what was it?" asked Jal, hastening to my relief. "Speak out or—or—."

"Or you will be guilty of some little ungentlemanly action, is it? Well then learn, young sir, that—that the sweetheart eloped with the rival," said Roshan.

"That was very lady-like, was it not?" enquired I. "But I know there is a sequel to this story. In it it was the lover that played the rôle of the loved one. He was in love with a bright little market-girl, and when the time for proclaiming the banns came, he ran away with a third-class stage player, whom the civilized world politely call an actress. People said it was the actress that ran away with the man, but right it is that the beautiful little market-girl was shamefully deserted, perhaps to make a wiser and a better match."

"Oh, Mr. B—," said Roshan's fiancé, clapping his hands, "if I were the author I would have amalgamated the two stories into one, only in that the hero and the heroine would both have been painted bad. The hero running away with an actress unknown to the heroine and the heroine running away with an actor unknown to the hero."

Roshan sent up a silvery laugh that spread through the air like *roshni*. "It is indeed a grand idea, Jal," said she. "Is it not, Mr. B—? I shall not marry you Jal until you write and publish that story."

" With the permission of Mr. B—," added Jal, " and the book to be dedicated to a shy little puss."

" If you want to be an author Jal," said I, " I would advise you to write anything but a love-story, though the plot you have sketched out is not without a moral."

At this stage there was an interruption. I was told that a sturdy young Parsi gent, dressed in plain but elegant English costume was leading a fine young Parsi lady to the spot. Jal and Roshan said it was a sight to see and to admire. It was a picture too profound even for a painter. It was Jamshd Aga leading his blind fiancee to the spot. The couple were unaware that they were followed at a respectable distance by others. The others were Mr. and Mrs. Mehelooji, Rusi and Magdalene ; Shirin and her parents. They had all come to see the young stragglers and Thriti, and finding the former had strayed and were missing, they followed them to their rendezvous. Servants with light chairs and carpets, baskets of refreshments and jugs of toddy, brought up the rear. The company were soon busy doing justice to the viands. Roshan, Magdalene and Shirin were called upon for songs. Shirin the sweet sang " The Blue Bells of Scotland " with a touch and a pathos all her own, which made an impression on the audience. Mr. Ardeshir asked what we were talking about before they came to the spot. Jal said he and I were rating the questioner's daughter and giving her a lecture on the besetting sin of Parsi girls, namely the undue development of a taste for Gospel-reading. Poor Ardeshir's mind went off to the Bible. Christian missionaries in India are said to force it on Indian boys and girls along with education just as the doctors force quinine pills on fever mixture and like many parents he was nervous. He was reassured when he was told that the Gospel we meant was novels. This evoked a hearty laugh. Mr. Behman Bahadurshah suggested that the company should call upon some one for a little bit of an oration or a satire on " Our Girls and their Gospel ". Rusi was the first to be picked out as the person

likely to do honour to the invitation. But he declined and, as he said, very respectfully resigned the honour in favour of a senior and superior individual. That gentleman he said was no less a personage than the Blind Doctor who was always to the fore on such occasions and must be so on this. The personage referred to hesitated and made his excuses, which would not be accepted. Bahadurshah pressed the hardest. The Blind Doctor, thus environed had to capitulate at discretion.

CHAPTER LVIII

OUR GIRLS AND THEIR GOSPEL

To every man there openeth
A high way and a low
And the high soul climbs the high way
And the low soul gropes the low.
And in between on the misty flats
The rest drift to and fro,
But to every man there openeth
A high way and a low
And every man decideth
The way his soul shall go.

"LADIES and Gents," said the Blind Doctor, "there is nothing in the world that stuns a man so much, no not even the call to risk one's life in the World's War, as the call to make even a wee-bit of a speech at a dinner party, especially one concerning our girls." (Rusi made a remark here that there were old girls as well as young girls in the community, some of whom were that minute gracing the congregation with their presence, which remark though uncivil, could not fail to be applauded.) "The ordeal through which you want me to pass is of your own seeking and selection. You will, therefore, hold me aloof from all reproof if I fail to come out of it with flying colours.

"The matters with which girls all over the world concern themselves before marriage are not the same with which they concern themselves after marriage. They are widely different. There are different degrees and different stages of taste and fondness. As a light hearted girl in frock or even in petti-coat she may have liked a Newfoundland or a terrier ; as a sombre old spinster and

as sedate woman in wedlock she generally developes a fondness for pusses and poodles. There is only one fondness which remains unchanged and unaltered and that fondness is the untiring zest for reading novels. Even the most religious woman is not free from this shackle. The only difference is that with them it's the book of religion first and then the novel, whereas with the others it's the novel first and nothing else. Whether as a girl, as a spinster or as a married woman it is the love-story that attracts the most. And why ? Because it pleases and satisfies the pride of the woman if the passage of her love and married life be as successful as that of the lovers in the story and because it serves as a comfort and a consolation if her own fate be as unhappy as that of the lovers depicted therein.

" Ladies and Gents, leaving tastes and twaddle aside we will now come to facts. Though I am unable to look at your faces I can imagine the gentlemen present here smiling superciliously at you ladies and looking forward with pleasure to the prospect of the delightful little chastisement which they think I am going to inflict on you. I'll tell the gents that they should not be so buoyant or so puffed up. For I have known and I know shoals of them reading and devouring novels of all sorts and selection, novels of doubtful taste and delectation, novels which dabble in dirty lore,—as much or much more than do the gentler sex. It is difficult to say which is more reprehensible or who is more to blame,—the faulty taste of the woman or the depraved taste of the man ! Speaking of blame, the man is certainly more to blame than the woman for it is he that is supposed to give the pattern and the cut for the clothes which the woman is to sew and to make up for herself and her children." (Cries of hear, hear, from Rusi and gentle applause from the fair sex.) " I would beg of you to remember, ladies and gents, that our Parsi girls or for the matter of that our Indian girls or even the Chinese girls are not different from the girls all over the West. Girls would not

be girls if they did not read novels. Males can afford to throw them aside and so can grown-up women but not so the girls. The question is not whether our girls should read novels but it is what novels our girls should or ought to read. There is no better form for carrying knowledge and instruction to the inmost recesses of a woman's heart and mind than novels. No better medium than instructive little novelettes and short stories which are as good and as wholesome as serial stories. The next question is, are our girls able to decide upon the choice of the books, periodicals and newspapers which they should read? The answer is clearly, no. Then who select the same for them? Do the brothers select them for the sisters? Do the fathers select them for their sons? Do the mothers select them for their daughters? Do the husbands select them for their wives? The answer to all these is, a big no. Each makes his or her own selection. The trade, if it could be called a trade, is in contraband articles. The males are afraid less their wives and their daughters, their sons and their brides, should see the novels that they read. The mothers entertain a similar fear in respect of their daughters and the daughters make it a point to rigidly conceal what they devour from prying eyes. This is the state of affairs, ladies and gents, go where you will and enquire how you may. Ask any of our girls if they know what is going on in their community; ask them what great issues are involved in a particular movement or agitation; ask them what particular questions relating to the vital interest of the community were discussed by a certain congregation at their last meeting; ask them if they have read that attractive leader in a Parsi daily on some burning communal question; ask them if they do read that historical narrative of old Iran appearing in the leading Parsi daily; ask them if they have read of their own kings and heroes; and they will shake their heads dolefully and dubiously as much as to say, 'oh, dear, no!' You will leave them only to see them from a distance burying their heads in their favourite novels."

The Blind Doctor here enquired if he was boring the audience. There were cries of 'no, no, go on, go on!'

"Sometime ago a lady writer in the *Nineteenth Century* magazine gave a very interesting account of a census she had instituted of the 'Reading of the Modern Girl'. She circulated a list of questions amongst some 200 girls betwern 15 and 18 years of age, who attended secondary schools in different parts of England. The questions asked of the girls were 'Which were their favourite novels, and whether they had read such authors as Jane Austin, Miss Gaskell, Miss Thackeray, Walter Scott, Dickens and Thackeray.' The answers received showed that the older novelists, both male and female whose works were devoured with zest by the mothers and grandmothers of the present generation, were for the most part unknown or neglected. A few of the elder girls named 'David Copperfield' of Dickens. The favourite novels of the modern girls seem to be Edna Lyall, Emily Zolla, Marie Correli and similar kind. Miss Thackeray's 'Story of Elizabeth' is pronounced by competent critics to be a most beautiful and pathetic narrative in the English language. Yet, to the question whether you like Miss Thackeray's stories, the answer returned was, 'I have not heard of her.'

"Educated daughters of educated or uneducated parents read English novels. Uneducated daughters read reproductions or translations of such novels. I use the words 'educated' and 'uneducated' not in their literary sense but in their limited and secondary aspect. Girls having a smattering of English and book-lore call themselves educated. For bringing senseless twaddle within the reach of easily susceptible English reading girls some of the lewd French and English authors are responsible. For furnishing this French and English lore in a borrowed garb to the Gujarati reading girls, the male and female translators in the Parsi papers are responsible. The ordinary routine of daily life in India and Parsi life furnishes ample material for original novels and tales of

real life. But neither the male nor the female writers turn their efforts in this direction. What is produced and put forward is a mere translation or transposition of second or third rate English novels cooked up and served out to suit popular taste which has consequently become corrupt and vitiated.

" The short story has almost as many branches as the families of Jones and Williams in Wales. Clever writers are constantly decking it out in new raiment, but, however skilfully it may be robed, practised eyes can always detect the bones of the old skeleton beneath the tinsel.

" Original plots are rarer than rubies and the search for them is wearisome. So difficult is the quest, indeed, that hundreds of writers are content to use the old familiar puppets and the same dingy scenery over and over again and to rely upon fresh and witty dialogue alone to pull them through. The freshness is not always obvious nor the wit very striking as a perusal of some of our newspapers, our novels and our much-boomed monthlies will convince you. But when once a so-called novelist, an editor or journalist has made a name for himself it takes the public a long time to find out that he is fobbing them off with third-rate stuff, as different from the yarns which won him fame as *shoddy* from broad-cloth.

" If only your story were as clean as it is clever, take it from me that these double entendres, these thinly-veiled hints at nastiness, are a woeful mistake. I know it is the fashion now a days to dress filth up in fine raiment and flaunt it on book-stalls, but it is literary prostitution nevertheless, and those who traffic in it will live to regret it sooner or later.

" We are not," said the Blind Doctor, " without one due share, and that's ample enough, of plagiarism. Charles Garvice is the author lately worn threadbare by some of the Parsi plagiarists without so much as crediting their translations with the names of the original novels or of their authors. The authors' permission to

translate the books is never obtained, but on the contrary impudent hints are put forward to hoodwink the credulous with the idea that the stories are original or built up on handy plots. I remember some one saying that plagiarism has the credit, at any rate, of perpetuating the original. Let us then, ladies and gents, console ourselves with that.

"But if you wish to be a successful writer—to raise yourself and your banking account at one and the same time—you must be in the swim. You must plunge into the flowing tide of human affairs and keep moving with it. You need not be a literary Holbein, peerless among your fellows, but at least you must be a strong swimmer, capable of keeping your head above water and of coolly and impartially surveying the ever-shifting panorama that is going on about you.

"Pen prostitution is one of the worst forms of moral misdemeanour that any writer be he a penny-a-liner or a panegyrist, a novelist or a journalist can be guilty of. Some prostitute their pen and the press to please others and some to profit; some to obey the superior will and some to exact obedience which they otherwise could not enforce. Speaking of the novelist and the journalist the one is as great a sinner in this direction as the other. Unreal and unwholesome stories and novels are as great a menace to society and its soundness as unconscientious and unrighteous journalism. Both are a moral cancer and a canker which bite away at the very root and heart of virtuous humanity. The traffic in cheap novel writing and the translation trade are perhaps not so paying as yellow journalism but the effects of the one are as baneful as those of the other. There are writers who have worked and lived all their life on the credulity of the all credulous. It's a false life they live and they lead. They know it and they feel it. And yet they are not opposed to create a false world and to make their votaries live in an atmosphere of falsehood of their own creation. The proprietors and the promoters of yellow journalism rarely practise what they

preach. Though dabbling in riches they still crave for more. When charged with unrectitude and want of integrity and honesty of purpose and intention they merely lift up their dress and clap and trap their belly as much as to say 'Friend, I am doing it for this and no more.' The cravings of the belly are stronger with these men than the cries of conscience. It's a sad pass the Parsi community has come to between the paltry novelist, the paradoxical journalist, the still more paradoxical *Dastoor* and the hyper-energetic pulpit preacher. One almost desires to see them all at the farthest end of Nova Scotia or Jerico. It is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

"Ladies and gents, before I took up my pen and waged war with it on the field of paper I looked into myself and asked my conscience two questions. The first question was whether I could resist the God Mammon. The second question was who was I going to serve. My conscience answered that money should not tempt me to say aught or to practise aught that I do not believe in or cannot conscientiously recommend. Conscience also dictated that my services could be best devoted to the interests of my own community. So was the pen taken up and so has it been plied midst the worries and the vagaries of life."

"A thankless job which I have always been flying from" remarked Rustom.

"Since I took up my pen, ladies and gents, I have been the target of severe taunts, unseemly temper and carping criticism. In this, the social reformer and the Socratist have not been far behind the fanatic. I have been charged with having my hobbies and mercilessly wielding the weapon of ridicule and biting sarcasm. Those who are so down on me forget that it is these qualities that have built up the bulwark of human progress.

"There are hobbies and hobbies. It all depends on what sort of hobbies you have. The hobbies I am charged with are—interminable running down of fanaticism ; religious fraud ; social and

moral aberration ; cheap pulpit preaching, destructive theosophical doctrines and dogmas ; *dastoors* and devotees of dubious propensities ; uncontrollable and irreconcilable religious and social cant ; indiscriminate charities ; tall talk from high places and little doings in practice; the absence of a general charity organisation ; the absence of unsophisticated social workers ; the absence of all means of advancing home training, education and culture ; the bold purging of the pure Zorastrian creed from the excrescences, prejudices and the gradual pulverization with which it is encompassed and threatened ; the establishment of Protestant Parsee-ism ; the introduction of purer tenets and truisms ; the introduction of a spirit of steady advancement and outspokenness ; the improvement of the prevailing tone of levity and lasciviousness of the Parsi society, of its newspapers, its periodicals and of its novel and story grinders. These are my hobbies but the uppermost of them all is the quality of calling a spade a spade and not beating about the bush. Ladies and gents, a hobby is a subject or a theme of ever recurring thought; a plan or a campaign of intrepid action on which one is constantly setting off. The Parsi community do not want dolls to dangle year in and year out but they certainly want hobbies to hammer at and to harmonize with an aim to organize.

"Coming to ridicule I would say that it is a weapon which every writer with a keen sense of the ridiculous and the humorous needs must wield. There is nothing which tells so much as ridicule. There is nothing which saves a community from the ridicule of its compatriots and confraternities as a pen which knows how to expose their community to ridicule.

" Ladies and gents, to my mind we have in a great measure unduly restricted the free operation of ridicule and this is one of the causes of our backward or retrograde progress and of the stagnation of steady reforms. We have narrowed the word so unmercifully that in common usage it has been brought to mean simple derision. True ridicule does not involve personal or offensive feel-

ings though outspoken writers have been most unjustly credited therewith by those who have their own ends to serve. Ridicule may excite laughter with comtempt but it is certainly not burlesque. We deride the man but ridicule the man or his performances. So this is the weapon I have wielded valiantly and fearlessly and I am proud of it ; let traducers and story mongers say what they will.

" Ladies and gents, before I conclude I crave your permission to repeat to you what the poet has sung in words of gold regarding ridicule ; in words which stand and will stand as lasting monuments to penmen and panegyrists who have craftily and successfully practised the noble art of ridicule :—

' Yes, I am proud : I must be proud to see
Men, not afraid of God, afraid of me :
Safe from the bar, the pulpit and the throne,
Yet touched and shamed by ridicule alone.
O sacred weapon ! left for Truth's defence,
Sole dread of folly, vice and insolence !
To all but heaven-directed hands denied,
The Muse may give thee, but the Gods must guide.
Reverent I touch thee, but with honest zeal,
To rouse the watchmen of the public weal,
To virtue's work provoke the tardy Hall
And goad the prelate slumb'ring in his stall.
Ye tinsel insects ! whom a court maintains,
That count your beauties only by your stains,
Spin all your Cobwebs o'er the eye of day,
The Muse's wing shall brush you all away.
All His Grace preaches, all His Lordship sings,
All that makes saints of queens, and gods of kings,
All, all but truth drops dead-born from the press,
Like the last zarette, or the last address.' "

CHAPTER LIX

AFTER ALL

Man with his burning soul
Has but an hour of breath
To build a ship of truth
In which his soul may sail–
Sail on the sea of death,
For death takes toll
Of beauty, courage, youth,
Of all but truth.....

ROBERT BRIDGES.

WE must now pry once more and for a while only and for the last time into the privacy of Meher Villa before we bid good-bye to each other.

Seated at a table and deep down into deliberation is Erach. He looked anything but happy. His face was flushed and puffy. It was anything but attractive. There was a dangerous look in his eye which would have warned people, if people were round him, to leave him alone and to his thoughts. He had just returned from an aimless roaming about the town, a look into one life and soul killing club and a peep into another and had returned quite in disgust and dissatisfied with himself and his lot. What was he, he thought, but a dependent on Meherbanoo. He was her favourite to-day but all the same he was her slave and she could put him out of her favour and show him the door, if she so desired, to-morrow. She talked of marrying him subject to a certain contingency. That contingency it was not pleasant to contemplate, for Ardeshir looked full ten years less his age. He, Ardeshir, did not allow care, uncertainty and anxiety to over-

power him. These elements which Ardeshir kept at bay tortured Erach. When Shera was alive things were quite different. She liked him and he liked her. There was not much difference in their ages. She would have been rich in her own possessions in course of time but it was not that alone that was a temptation. The girl was of a fiery temper and yet she had a good corner in her heart always for him. It seemed as if Fate itself was at work. Whilst making love to the daughter he had allowed her mother to treat him like a boy. The mother's liking for him was quite innocent then. But things were different now. He was now a plaything, to be set aside at pleasure. Goodness knows how long he would have continued in this reverie, when lo! some one unseen approached him from behind and tapped him on the back. So taken unawares he started up to his feet. He looked behind and his temper was up. It was rarely down now a days. He growled and glared at Meherbanoo for it was she. "What right have you," he muttered between his teeth, "what right have you to disturb me so?"

"I am sorry I have disturbed you, *Sheth Saheb!* I am indeed very very sorry I have broken in upon your solitude so rudely! But why did you start so? Surely you were not thinking of murdering me—me who am—"

"My patron, my Proclaimer-General, my Female Lord and Master, my life and light! What would'st thou have with me, Meherbanoo? Why won't you leave me in peace? Why do you kill me with your tongue and your taunts? Do you wish to deal with me like how you did with that angel who is now no more?" he enquired dropping back into his chair.

"And pray who is that angel? Is it my daughter Shera, you mean? When on earth she was not an angel. She was only a frail mortal like you and me. Mayhap she may be an angel there now. If so, well and good. For then we might hope to be ditto."

"Fie on you Meherbanoo," roared the man. He rose so

furiously that he staggered the woman who was standing close by and who would have fallen were she not holding tight by the chair.

"It is my turn now," she almost gasped forth with rage. "What right have you to treat me so? Treat me so within my own precincts and premises. You oaf, you lubber, you lazy loon, you forget yourself. See, how in your madness you struck your fist against my chest. It was enough to break any ordinary woman's ribs. But I am not an ordinary woman. You look a culprit now." "Erach," she said cooling down, "you stand self-accused. You plead for mercy. There! There! Don't try to apologize. It does not suit you at all. I don't like cowards. I know you did not do that intentionally. It will teach you to behave better in future."

"Erach," continued Meherbanoo, "what has come over you? You are daily becoming more and more restless. Your mind is never at ease. Mahomed who sleeps by your bedside says you mutter in your sleep. The mutterings are mostly execrations and anathemas. Who do you hurl them against? Is it against your boon companions? You go to races. You have taken to card and dice. You have made friends with the bottle and you are making ducks and drakes of my money. I have paid your debts once, twice, thrice and I shall pay them no more." Then without allowing him to speak she stamped her foot haughtily on the ground and said or rather chaffed out, "I tell you I shall not pay them any more. It's a regular blackmail you are levying on me."

"It's not debt, Meherbanoo," said Erach, "not this time at least. It's something else that troubles me—something that you could have remedied long ago but which you have put off from day to day. I shall stand it no longer. Wherever I go, be it the club, the carnival, the maidan, the theatre, the races, they all point at me and make fun of me. This sort of railery is simply revolting. It must be ended. In a word, Meherbanoo, if it is to be, it must be. You must marry me."

A smile, a sneer, a snort, then the woman's lips parted

disclosing the alabaster teeth within. She took particular care of her teeth. A loud and contemptuous laugh escaped the woman's lips and died away in the air around.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Hee! Hee! Hee! How very funny? I did not know Mr. Erach Aspandiar Aga that you can be so funny, so very funny when you choose," and then she laughed again. It was a laugh which struck a chill on the listener's heart—a laugh which he thought he would never forget.

"Easier said then done, *Sheth Saheb!* If I marry you now we must both hang; for seven years penal detention in His Majesty's jail is worse than hanging. Is it not? You must wait, wait till—"

"Wait till you are free to marry me! Wait till Mr. Ardeshir Edalji Dalal is gathered to his good ancestors! Is it not, Mrs. Dalal? A fine promise indeed! You know madam that that man, that is your husband elect, as you have said so often never grows. He looks as if he become younger every day and more so since he left you. You were wrong if you thought that he would pine away and plunge into eternity, heart-broken and humbled. It only shows how highly he priced you and held you like a prize. Joke apart, Meherbanoo, I know I am indebted to you for many a thing but all that is nothing till you marry me."

"I'll do it, Erach, if you will only point out or pave the way for me. You surely don't want to hire a bravado at my expense, of course, and send him to a lasting sleep or mayhap you would like to do it yourself; but in that case you may take it from me I shall not marry a murderer."

For a minute or two there was a dead silence in the room. It was difficult to say who was victorious—the man or the woman. It was a trial of prowess, in which both stood even.

"Meherbanoo," roared Erach, "there is only one way out of the difficulty. I know and so does everybody that the Parsi Marriage Law is a huge mockery, a blunder, a lasting blot. You don't want Ardeshir and he does not want you. And yet who are

you both ? What's the happiness of both of you worth that the law should give you relief? The law can divide and cut you into two ; but it cannot make you one again or let you suit yourself elsewhere : Let you chuck aside the miserable and look for all that is pleasant once again. The law says I'll give you relief and very readily if you know only how to manage me. There is a word in the law which begins with the first letter in the alphabet and ends with the last but one—that word is adultery. I wonder, Meherbanoo, why that fool of an Ardeshir who is an adult has not made use of this magical and masterful word. He has only to go to the court and to win. You have only to keep away and not show yourself before His Lordship. Your silence will be consent and so will be mine, for I shall be the second accused you know and will hide behind you in safety. Addle-pated fool that Ardeshir ! What I see, what everybody sees, he only does not see. None such a fool as he that has eyes but will not see. Ardeshir's loss will be your gain and mine too. His loss will be no loss to you for your humble servant you know is always at your beck and call. There ! There ! Meherbanoo, don't be angry. We are lovers and must not be under restraint. If my proposal does not suit you there is an alternative. Charge Ardeshir and see what comes of it. If you don't win you will have the satisfaction of robbing him of his good name which is worth more than money. It will plant an arrow into him and ten to one will kill him earlier than expected. It is possible he may oppose and it is as probable he may not. In any case we will have the pleasure of enjoying the fun. You shake your head. Well then Meherbanoo, you and I in that case must live as we do or part for ever."

"But if you don't go to your companions and make yourself so cheap everywhere they will have nobody to sneer at and none to make fun of," observed Meherbanoo coolly.

"Tut ! Tut ! Pshaw ! Meherbanoo, we males have the credit of saying things to one's face. We don't bite behind the back and

stab a man or a woman out of all reputation as you tender ones, you handsome ones, you charming ones do. You go into your own society, a society which is as frail as a feather. They all cajole you, humour you, pet you and pamper you. This is our dear dear Mehra, they say. She is a saint, the personification of all that is good and great in woman and how nice and lovely too for her age ! they exclaim. How large and how liberal-hearted ! Why she has not a bad word for anybody. Dear little woman ! God bless her. They pretend to talk in an undertone and yet take good care that you hear them. You leave pleased with yourself, pleased with them and pleased with the world. You walk not on your feet but on tip-toe. In a word you are in elysium—an elysium more pure and bright than that of the Greeks. You get into your carriage comfortably drowned into the soft cushions, shower kisses on your poodle,—lucky little limb of the carnival kind. The groom who knows the ladies' ways mentally consigns that little limb to chaos and wishes he were in its place. Poor dear man ! If he knew the state of his lady's mind at the time he would have known that she would have been ready to bestow the same favour on him for she was so very happy ; but he did not and by way of revenge he cracks his whip and bestows it plentifully on the unoffending animal he is driving. The carriage has hardly time to make a start when the sycophants throw off their veil and commence to sing a different song. Oh that nasty woman ! one cries out. I wonder she is not ashamed of herself. She has left all sense of shame behind with her lover. Oh the impudence ! says another. Look at her cheek ! She is a lovely woman no doubt ; 'but when lovely woman stoops to folly, etc.'—you know. She has sent her husband to Jerico, buried him alive, wrecked and ruined him and taken to that young rascal, says a third. But what is worse she killed her sister and killed her own daughter after her, says the fourth. This is your female world, Meherbanoo," said the speaker Erach. " Your satellites and your luminaries, your sun and your centre of attraction who revile only to relish. But let that

pass. What do you wish to do with me ? I am standing on ground which every minute threatens to sink and swallow me. I have no position and prestige, no footing and no foundation. Have mercy on me, Mehra ! It is madness to think of it ! See, how others less deserving are so fortunate. That fellow, that worthless beggar Jamshed Aga, they say, was quietly married yesterday to that blind bat, Thriti. He takes her about like a beggar leading his blind wife about for alms. He is a hero. They cry Hurrah and offer him hero-worship. Cheap popularity you know. They say, the doctors are now giving hopes of her eyes, a sort of a partial restoration. If that happen what about me. They will crack their fingers harder at me than ever. That little imp, Jal, who is now a big and burly little man is married to—you know to whom ! It's that handsome little girl Roshan,—the daughter of a lady who is on notoriously bad terms with her husband. The lady I refer to, I see, is starting out of her chair in sheer surprise. You think I am joking, Meherbanoo. I swear by that beautiful neck of yours, I am not. It was all hurried but there were strong reasons for it. That clown of a Rusi, that handsome fellow on whom, if reports don't belie me, you tried your hand once but who turned his back on you, is betrothed to that Scottish girl, Magdalene. They say he is about to start on a tour and it was for this reason that the two marriages have been celebrated so hurriedly. It may be that they wanted to give us too no opportunity of creating mischief. There, Meherbanoo, it won't do your fretting and fuming over it now. You are a mother-in-law now, you see. You have a graduate of the University, a student of law, an embryo barrister for your son-in-law. You have the pride of seeing your sister's daughter to whom you stand in the light of a dear, dear mother married to your brother's son who is the pride of the Bombay Bar. Happy woman you ! How can a fellow like me expect you to marry him ?" Meherbanoo clenched her teeth and closed her fist as if making ready to strike the speaker who manœuvred and moved out of her way.

"Is it all true, Erach? Beware if you are cheating me! That white little puss with the scar and the limp could not have accepted that beggar. I thought she was waiting for a prize."

"I swear, Meherbanoo, that all I say is true. You will see it all in the papers. The deuce take the papers. They are birds of ill omen! They give priority to death news over marriage tidings. As to Rusi being a beggar, Meherbanoo, he is no more a beggar than you are. Why he is literally flushed with money now. That singing woman, Motidana, with whom he played at dolls and dangles left him a good round sum. His sister and brother-in-law who are so mad after him are more than ever so by way of appreciation of his proved innocence. That fellow Mehelooji has adopted him openly now in spite of his crafty excuses and objections. There is to be a dinner in honour of the occasion. He is to be apprenticed to a big Yankee firm in America. Fortune like misfortune never comes single. It never rains but it pours. How I wish I were in that fellow's shoes instead of being tied to your apron strings."

At the last words the speaker, Erach, stopped abruptly. Something, something to which he had not given so much as a single thought before rushed into his mind. He grew white as a sheet and folded both his hands on his breast in despair. Then as suddenly unfolding them he slapped and tapped his forehead and exclaimed, "Good gracious, woman! We are both mad! Stark mad! Raving mad! Imbeciles! Who, ever thought of an aunt marrying her nephew! Who, ever thought of a nephew marrying an aunt! The law won't sanction it. The prelate will not sanctify it. There has not been an instance of the kind before in Parsi history. Have you ever thought of that? You must have. You are not a woman to miss a single detail and yet you have sent me on a fool's errand. You have been leading me a wild-goose chase. I shall call you to account for it or—or I am not my father's son."

The woman so addressed, quick-witted as she was, had not been slow to perceive the storm that was gathering,—the uplifted eyebrows

and the clouds on the forehead. All, the man and the slave was up in arms now and a contest seemed inevitable. The woman drew from her pocket a bank-note which showed in big figures three big ciphers after the unit one. "There, Erach dear," she said, leaving her seat and holding it before his eyes, "how stupid I am? You had told me you wanted it badly and who am I to refuse it to you?" The eye of the addressee watered. His lips parted in a curious smile. His hands uplifted themselves mechanically. The palms opened and engulfed the bank-note. Meherbanoo went up to him. She could not fail to notice that he was bathed in perspiration. She felt his hand and found it icy cold. "What's the matter, Erach?" she said. "You are afraid I'll give you up. The law as it stands does not debar me from marrying you and even if it does, those who know how to defy the law can dare all. True it is that the social laws, call them moral laws if you will, which are unwritten, forbid nuptial ties and banns of wedlock between father and daughter, brother and sister, uncle and niece, aunt and nephew and such like blood relations; but we had an instance not very long ago of a certain Parsi aunt in high life marrying her nephew who was much her junior in age. Don't you remember it, Erach?"

"That I do. But what about the *Dastoors?* Will they do it?" asked he.

"Fiddle-sticks! A fig for your *Dastoors!* Poor dears! You talk as if they have a conscience to stain. It was sold away long, long ago. Had it been otherwise how could one of them have consented to join together the hands of that aunt and nephew. Money is their God and they will dare everything for it."

Erach smiled a bitter smile. It was a smile in which doubt and derision were combined.

"Don't sing, Meherbaiji, until you are out of the woods and left it far behind. That aunt you speak of had no encumbrance in the shape of an Ardeshir."

It was now Meherbanoo's turn to be confused. She looked

staggered. There was a breathless silence during which each was taken up with his and her own thoughts. Each did not dare to break it. It was Meherbanoo that rallied first. "Erach," she said, as if murmuring to herself, "this day next week will be Shera's *versi*, anniversary day. It must be celebrated with due eclat. I mean to have the self-constituted High Priest of the Parsis to do it. I mean to call a number of *Mobeds*. There must be any amount of fruit and flower, sweets and sweetmeats, viands and desserts and cooking and feasting. I rely on you to help me." Erach laughed a loud and thrilling laugh.

"Meherbanoo," he said, "it is all like the old cat going on a pilgrimage after making clean sweep of a legion of rats. Call the High Priest and a string of *Mobeds*. The deuce take them all. I wish they were at sea. It is they primarily, the *Dastoors*, that are steering the communal bark and all that is good and great in the community so adrift that they threaten to flounder and fracture it. But, Mehera dear, won't you have the new couples down here at least for the day? It will add so much to the eclat. The old cat will then be doing it all complete. Without them the pilgrimage will be a fiasco. But what must Shera be thinking of your project? The Parsi *Bhughats* and *Bhugvans* say and they have the support of men like Sir Oliver Lodge and William Stead, that they are in constant touch with the dead and they with us. We can call them into our room, talk with them, chat with them, consult them, and confabulate with them any time we like. We can ask them to withdraw when we choose. They divine our thoughts and we can take photos of theirs. The *Bhughats* and *Bhugvans* urge that if we prefer ethereal good to earthly one, heavenly bliss to peace and plenty on earth, we must leave all business, all profession, all trade and all progress aside and be constantly talking to the dead and be talked to by them. To do this we must all give up the world and be saints. Look how they prosper and fatten at the expense of the credulous though they are far from

being saints ! You are anything but a saint, Meherbanoo ; take my word for it. Have nothing to do with these religion-mongers and ritualists ; these men who believe one thing and pronounce and practise another. Have the most ordinary ceremonies, carry out the most simple observances and send out a quiet prayer or two full of penitence if you will, from your very soul which can be accepted by the dead and by God and serve as a salve to your sinful soul :—Amen ! "

" Is that all, Mr. Erach ? " enquired Meherbanoo. " Is there nothing else on your mind ? If I am not mistaken this is not all that troubles you."

The pale face of the man grew paler still.

" I have a confession to make," he said, said so slowly and so timidly that Meherbanoo could hardly catch the words. " Yes, I have a confession to make and I think I must do it. But before I do it take this back," he said, handing her the bank-note which Meherbanoo had given him. " I don't want it. I shall not want that wretched stuff any more here or there. I shall leave it to you to save me or slay me. Meherbanoo, I am a—forgerer :—You were a fool to trust me. You were my evil genius. You tempted me and I fell. I have signed a cheque in your name for ten thousand rupees and cashed it. They have not found it out yet but they will soon enough. When they do, what then ! "

There was again a silence. It was the silence of death. Meherbanoo looked as if she had suddenly turned into ice. The blood ran cold in her veins. A shiver of disgust passed through her whole frame.

" So you have really done that ! " she managed to murmur.

" Don't ask me that, Meherbanoo. You must put that question not to me but to the *Gora Sahebs* who rule us ; to the framers of their laws ; to those who have sanctified and sanctioned the sin of running races. Ask it also of those who under the name of sports suck the blood of the people like bears and throw away their car-

casses. True it is that they occasionally give a thousand here and ten thousand there. But what are these thousands to the lakhs upon lakhs of lives that they blast and the lakhs upon lakhs of gold and silver bobs that they pocket. The Government are trying to lay their foot on smaller evils and allow this licensed *loot*, this blunder and plunder, this broad-day robbery, this sin and sacrilege to flourish in the very sight of God and man His masterpiece. Sporting clubs—clubs indeed ! What right have they to kill the ryot in this murderous, reckless, go-ahead fashion ? Sporting clubs indeed ! Why ! They are asylums of freebooters. The honours of the turf which are mainly sucked from the warm blood of the toilers and moilers are all their own ;—they who call themselves the promoters and propagators of athletic sports. The warm turf warms them who crush the legions and roll in riches. Whilst feathering their nests it empties the warm nests of the people—people who become frantic and desperate and turn into maniacs and paupers ; people who invoke curses on themselves and their ruiners ; people who die broken-hearted or commit suicide in sheer desperation. Is this justice ? Is this mercy ? Is this clemency ? Is this civilisation, enlightenment, advancement, progress and prosperity, I ask Meherbanoo," demanded Erach, red with rage and full of burning ire. " I say it is perfidy, prolific plunder. Meherbanoo, you have spoiled me. You have ruined me. If you had not plied me with money and primed my purse ; aye, encouraged me to go and even accompanied me to this field of damnation and the devil, I would not have been as I am to-day, aye, a forgerer ! And now ? What now ? Now you will hand me over to the tender mercies of the marauders to be dealt with as they please. Now you will not touch me and will shiver and be shocked if I touch you. And yet it is you who want to celebrate Shera's anniversary ! Oh ! Shera ! Shera ! How I wish I had gone with you ! How I wish I had taken your place ! "

" Hush ! Hush ! " said Meherbanoo, putting her hand on his

shoulder and shaking him soundly to rouse him. " The very walls have ears, Erach, you are talking like a mad man. I shall not guarantee your safety if you are overheard."

" I don't care if I am overheard. I wish to be overheard," returned the youth, shaking her off furiously. " I am tired of life ; tired of dancing attendance on you ; tired of hearing people talk about us ; tired of playing at hide and seek and going about like a thief. I want death. Oh death ! Where is thy sting ! Oh heaven ! Where is thy mercy ! " The words were hardly out of his mouth when he brought out a small phial from his pocket and applied it to his lips before Meherbanoo could snatch it away. The next minute he tottered, his legs gave way under him and he fell fainting into a chair. The same minute a loud cry rang through the air. It was as loud as it was piercing. It resounded, throbbed and throttled throughout the house. The author of this cry was Meherbanoo. A minute more and the room which but a minute before contained but two attracted and contained a hundred. A doctor came in, then a second and then a third, but it was all over. Erach had gone, gone for ever, gone to stand before the great judgment seat, the great Assizes of the mighty Asylum of the Almighty.

CHAPTER LX

KNITTING THE THREADS

" Give currency to reason, improve the moral code of society, and the theory of one generation will be the practice of the next."

IT would be futile to make even the faintest effort to describe in words the consternation and the confusion that ensued. It would be as futile to discern the feelings and the thoughts of those present in the room. The mental trouble, the anxiety and the perturbation were great indeed. It is difficult to say who was more affected : more overpowered : the softer or the harder sex : the men or the women. Children in such cases count for nothing. They stand by panic-stricken and powerless. It is equally difficult to say who was more pitied, the dead man or the live woman : difficult to say who were for the man, who were for the woman and who were for both. Some would assume that the women must have been all for the woman and the men all for the man. The fact is however that they had completely lost their balance of mind and were unable to think or decide for themselves. All that they could see and divine was that Erach was a corpse and that he held a little phial fast clutched in the fingers of his right hand. The doctors alone had preserved their balance and were imperturbable. They took in the whole situation in a trice. Two of them were from the same street ; the third was from a neighbouring one. Some of the tenants had run for them and told them where they were wanted. Were it someone else than Meherbanoo they would have found excuses but here was a silk and satin client and what is more a society lady to oblige if not to fleece. Two of them were on intimate terms with Meherbanoo and paid close attention to her. They did not accept fees

from her nor made any charge for medicines. It never occurred to them to show this indulgence where it was really wanted. But we are straying. We have said that the doctors took in the situation at once. There was the man lying stark dead in the chair with unmistakable evidence on his face of great and recent excitement consequent on great mental distress. There was the phial clutched fast in the right hand and almost empty. They smelt it and found that it was strychnia. It was a clear case of suicide they thought. They declined to give a certificate of death by natural causes and they vied with each other in making their excuses in the matter to the lady of the house. A coroner's inquest they said was inevitable.

The consternation in the house had drawn a crowd near it which brought the police in its wake. With the instinct of rats running out of a falling house, the tenants and neighbours that were drawn in the dead man's room filed out in groups and left Meherbanoo almost alone. Her condition then was simply pitiable. For the first time in her life she sent up a woeful appeal to heaven for help. That appeal was responded to by two gentle hands timidly laid on her shoulders. Meherbanoo feeling the touch uncovered her face which was buried in her kerchief and to her surprise she saw Roshan and Thriti standing on each side of her. Two young men stood a few paces away from them. They were Jal and Jamshed Aga. Meherbanoo did not try to avoid the touch. She only held her head down the whilst her tears were running free and fast ; she felt giddy and would have fainted when a glass full of water was presented to her. She quaffed it and was herself again. Thriti and Roshan were not slow to improve upon the occasion. They sat down close to her and patted her lovingly. The occasion was too grave for words. For the first time in their lives the tears of the two innocent damsels and those of the hard and fast woman of the world mixed together. For the first time in their lives their hearts came together, came together in a way as if never to disunite.

A day or two before, Thriti who always said she was seeing her mother and her cousin in her dreams had stated that she had seen them both the previous night. They both had enjoined her to go with her husband and pay her respects to her aunt in honour of her wedding even at the risk of being slighted and sent out. Thriti had insisted on paying this visit and Jamshed could not withstand her persuasions. So it was arranged that both the couples should call on Meherbanoo and make their obeisance to her. Thriti had obeyed a pious injunction though it may be the working of her own fancy and she never regretted the step she had taken. Meherbanoo felt considerably relieved at sight of Jamshed. Soon enough he fell a-talking to her on business matters. He talked to her as if they were never before anything but the closest friends in the world. He managed to extract from her briefly what had occurred, sent out a number of telephone messages and wrote some hurried epistles. One of these he despatched to the coroner who was his friend and of whom he begged to lose no time in holding the inquest at the morgue where the dead body was conveyed in a motor. A letter was found in one of the pockets of the deceased's coat. It showed that the deceased had made up his mind to commit suicide. He had contracted large debts and had borrowed large sums of money from Marwadis. All this he had spent in various speculations and on the race field where he had contracted debts of honour.

What are these debts of honour ? Who was the originator of these very honourable words ? They are supposed to be debts incurred on the race field under the benign shade and shelter of sporting clubs all over the world. They indicate the gambler's inability to discharge his liabilities. If he does not pay he is a defaulter and is denied the chance of greater ruin and damnation until he clears himself. Like honour among thieves and robbers there is said to be a sort of honour among these very honourable men.

Debts of honour and defaulter indeed ! Where is the honour in

ruining oneself ? Where is the honour in helping a hapless wretch to do it ? The law makes a show of not enforcing payment of these honourable debts, though the framers of the law have not set their face against this gamble. The civilized world after the world war is said to be aiming at and intending to progress towards great ends. A show is also made of suppressing lotteries and bucket shops which are a minor evil compared to these animal sports. And yet we are all practically sporting—sporting with the hopes, ambition and honour of the people, killing their sons and daughters under their very eyes, sporting with everything that tends to their uprise and onward progress. The race of life becomes a hopeless flight soon as one begins to take part in these animal races—these trials of strength of the four-footed. This race rings the death-knell of the race of human glory. The flight of the money bird is swifter than the flight of these beasts. At every stage it gains velocity which gives increased zest to competition. Coffers are filled and emptied in rapid succession until the men themselves are no more than the beasts ; until the beasts are better than the men. Flitting leaves are the sport of every wind and the rolling stone gathers no moss. Never does man appear to greater disadvantage than when he is the sport of his own ungoverned passions. We daily read and talk about the sporting world. We do not sport on the lyre, the love and hope of youth ; we but stretch these great aspirations of manhood on the funeral pier.

The evening papers announced the demise of Erach. The funeral rites and obsequies were to be performed the next morning. An enterprising chronicler who was a minister in equity of unintelligible intelligence and a fabricator-general to boot, and who prided himself upon gathering and giving the freshest and the latest news of all kind with the speed of lightning whilst announcing the demise under the head " Domestic Occurrences " had the following budget of bungle in one of its columns on another page under the head " News and Novelties " :—

"We have just collected from a very reliable source some very pleasing intelligence in connection with a highly respected and honourable Parsi lady. We have great pleasure and we consider ourselves very fortunate in being the first to be able to impart it to our readers. We should be very sorry if along with the surprise we give a little agreeable shock to the readers. Bai Meherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal is well known to us all. Not long ago we had to perform the painful duty of communicating the shocking intelligence of her eldest daughter's death and certain unpleasant events which had transpired in her family, but which were not of her own seeking. We have just learnt that this highly charitable and enterprising lady is about to start on a tour round the world. Mr. Erach Aspandiar Aga, a young man of great promise who is her nephew is to accompany her. Bai Meherbanoo is said to have given a power of attorney to her lawyers to manage her affairs during her absence. We wish the party God-speed and a very happy return to the land of their birth. Bai Meherbanoo and her nephew belong to the rich, reformed and cultured class. The intended tour will, we have no doubt, be of great benefit to them and to the community especially if their experiences and exploits be published in volume form."

The day after the funeral the eyes of the readers of this very valuable journal landed on the following further paragraph :—

OBITUARY NOTICE.

"In our yesterday's issue under the head of "Domestic Occurrences" we announced the death of Mr. Erach Aspandiar Aga, aged thirty-five. We regret to say that Mr. Erach's death was not caused by natural causes or by accident but by forced ones. We were not slow to gather

this information as soon as the news of the death was communicated to us but we had to consider the feelings of Bai Meherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal who had all along very creditably protected and sheltered this hapless young man and had done her level best to improve him and wean him from bad ways. We are more sorry for Bai Meherbanoo than for the deceased who as the reader will see from the proceedings of the jury which are printed overleaf was a hardened gambler and speculator. It was quite in the order of things that such a man should have ended in the way he has done. Bai Meherbanoo was talked about in various ways and her name was most undesirably and unjustifiably mixed up with the evil doings of the deceased. But it is the fate of all those who interest themselves in young relatives and try to show them the high way to honour and duty. Bai Meherbanoo may well feel assured that she has our heartfelt sorrow and sympathy in her bereavement."

Muddle ! you say ; but point me a paper that does not make such milder or stronger muddles now a days. It is the zeal, call it the madness, to be the first in the field. It's on all fours with the frenzy of horse races. The one is as great a sport as the other.

It's death, even the death of men like Erach, that effects many a good which the best of men with the best of intentions and means fail to effect in their life time. The death of a unit is known to have brought peace and concord into families long estranged and long notorious for feuds and foibles. The death of a young heir-apparent however shocking to his parents has been the cause of rejuvenating many a fallen charity and institution ; of raising or establishing long needed charities and of giving a helping hand to helpless friends and relatives. The death of a sinner has not unfrequently been a lesson to and improved or saved others who were sinners like him. Shera's death did not improve Meherbanoo,

No, it had given her a temporary shock. It was because Meherbanoo could hang on to Erach. Erach was a male and better fitted than Shera to humour and indulge her for he was as poor as a church-mouse and depended on her. He gone, the mighty lady was sorely shaken and tottered but for a time only. She tried to forget the event but could not. If he had died a natural death, she would not perhaps have felt it so hard. But she thought there was the hand of God in removing Erach from her in the way he had done. She tried to bear up and to resume her composure, her peace of mind and her pride, but at every fresh effort she broke down afresh. Erach's funeral was a model of simplicity. There was no glamour and no clamour. No false shine and no show about it. It was free from all vanity and all waste. It presented a glaring contrast to the funeral which was carried out at the same place a year ago. The entire control and management of the affair was now in other hands. Jamshed Aga discharged the duties of the occasion and played the man of the house for the moment in a way which won him praise from all, except from those who had come to cavil and to scoff. There were no false tears, no bickerings and no complaints, no abuses and no anathemas, as on the previous occasion. On that occasion it was all false and falsehood. On this occasion it was all severe truth and rigid reality. Meherbanoo could not afford to be false to-day. There was something in her appearance, something in the rigid contour of her face, something in her firmly compressed lips and contracted eyebrows, something in the lines of her forehead that warned all triflers, even the scandal-mongers, and held them completely at bay.

There were the Bahadurshahs ; there were the Meheloojiwallas ; there was Rusi ; all moving about and all a-thinking and a-doing, issuing orders and expecting them to be obeyed. Even Ardeshir was there. Meherbanoo offered no objection to his presence. The husband and wife did not allow their eyes to meet

and avoided meeting each other. Each felt the force and hand of Fate. If anything, Meherbanoo felt it in a much greater measure. Could she have forbidden his presence there ? Why did she allow it ? Why was she not consulted ? Why could she not dismiss him now ? These thoughts and others were laid aside the moment they entered her brain portals. The husband was too good and too noble to feel elated or to look daggers or domineeringly at his wife or to make a show of triumph. He was a man who accepted the world and its vagaries for what they are worth, accepted everything and all things as matters of course. He never felt elated at unsought successes or triumphs and was never cast down, never cried and never complained in times of reverses. He knew but too well that Venus never smiles in a house of tears. He did not, therefore, expect the lady of the house to welcome him much less to smile at him. It was enough for him that she tolerated his presence in the house. What it must have cost her to do so he could well imagine. If punishment were wanted, there it was for her. Ardeshir did not however stay there overnight nor touched or tasted of Meherbanoo's salt or water as we Indians say. You English and foreign readers must take these to mean food and drink. And what about the servants ? Those who know them will have no difficulty in knowing what they were about. They fell a-talking and a-chattering and a-biting each other's ears. Each had his own impressions and his own version and conclusion. The cat, by which honourable term they called their lady, was for once beaten they said by the rat. Some said the mouse Erach had taken advantage of the cat's kindness and the cat had therefore put a little poison in him and killed him. Others maintained that it was the mouse that wanted to kill the cat and that the cautious cat had turned the tables against him. Some urged that the he-cat of a husband was a fool to enter a house from which he was so ignominiously dismissed. Others observed that the ignominy was all on the she-cat's side. It was she that was now eating dust and ashes.

But the majority of them who knew the he-cat well were prepared to receive him with open arms and to welcome his *regimè*.

Veracity is the heart of morality. It is virtue itself and in the end it is the virtuous that triumph. Even the servants knew this. They were waiting to see the husband and wife *tête-â-tête*. They were all on the alert to eavesdrop and to overhear. But it was not to be. Well would it have been for masters and mistresses if servants could bury the collection of scandals and secrets into their own bosoms. But where is the servant that does it? Bearing secrets in the bosom means burning, bursting or scathing the latter and a servant would be the last person to do it.

Poor dear Roshan! She was trying to overcome her disgust for her mother. Jal said, he could never do it. Th riti, if she could not overcome the disgust, had kept it well at bay. She told Roshan and Jal that if they would make an effort they could also do it. Roshan was her mother's daughter and she made the effort. She felt pity for her mother and pity gave rise to sympathy. Sorrow, for even Erach's death was not without it, completed the good work. Meherbanoo looked slyly at her husband to see if there were sneers on his face and blamed her eyes when she detected none.

What does this transgression and transformation, upheaval and downheaval, this rising in rebellion and this suppression of rebellious feelings, this crushing underfeet of fellow-feeling and kinship and this resuscitation and regeneration of dead feelings and reunion of hearts and of the heartless, mean? It means that our doubts and our differences, our quarrels and our brawls, our suspicions and our severities, our severance and our separation are but superficial and not sustaining. Born of one common parentage and evolved from the same origin, He who gave rise to the evolution never intended us to be other than one at heart and one in mind, if not one in the body. If God intended brawls and turmoils, discords and disputes, to be interminable, God's world

would have broken asunder long ago. But the world holds on and moves on and so long as she does so, we its children, over what nearest and farthest part of it we may be, will hold on and move on like one common unit.

The fifth day after Erach's demise Magdalene called on Meherbanoo to offer her condolences and to console. Rusi accompanied her and they put in their appearance in Meherbanoo's room together. They addressed each other as Rusi and Mag which was enough to convince Meherbanoo that what Erach had told her about the *Juddin* betrothal was true. But Meherbanoo was a woman of the world. She waited for the moment Rusi would let go his hold of Mag's hand. Her eyes then travelled to their fingers and there were the small golden circlets that encircled them. They were unmistakable signs of on-coming matrimony. For the first time after Erach's death she smiled. The couple did not fail to notice it and when each offered a hand in a shake, Meherbanoo's eyes took a very short but closer survey. She very slightly and unconsciously shook her head as if doubting the wisdom of the proposed union. Such marriages she was brought to believe from infancy upwards by unbelieving persons never could come true or be happy. She never for a moment contemplated that the marriage which she herself intended to perpetrate would, if consummated, have been far the worse. She looked condescendingly at the couple, asked them to be seated and entered first into a few common-places and then into the particulars of Rusi's proposed departure to Freedom Land. Rusi was going to America as an apprentice to a well-known mercantile firm for a period of three years certain with the ultimate object of expanding and forming wider connections with the firm. Mag was to follow him. She could not go immediately as her dear father's health was failing. He, Rusi, was for entering into the matrimonial ties before his departure but on second thought he had agreed with Mag that it had better be done in the Land of Freedom.

CHAPTER LXI

TELEPATHY OF LOVE THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF LETTERS

" Friendship is the greatest chain of society, and intercourse of letters is one of the chiefest links of that chain."

SOCIETY exists for the benefit of its members and not the members for the benefit of society. Rustom was now a little bit of a member or link or limb of a very large society, perhaps one of the largest collections of human heads all over the world. He was a lover and loved Magdalene dearly but he was not a prattler. So even in his letters he prattled but little of his love. The business of his life was to entertain and be entertained in return. The world itself, he said, is one scene of huge entertainment. It is this entertainment, he said, which breathes enlightenment and pleasure. Were it not so, the world would be unbearable and life hardly worth living.

We Indians have it that on the sixth night after birth the Goddess of Fortune who is the accredited Clerk of the Crown of Almighty God and who is known as *Vemai* writes the child's future in indelible ink either gold, red or black. The gold ink is a sure indication of golden fortune which carries one rolling in gold and ease through life. The red indicates constant ups and downs and a stormy life. The black indicates pains and penalties, privations and degradation for ever and aye. Under the black, one is marked either for suicide or cruel death. When the red and black are interspersed with the gold, it indicates serious but not lasting troubles. So it was with Rusi. *Vemai* had written his future in letters of gold but there were a few red and a very few black specks on the vellum. *Vemai* was said to be smiling and laughing and caricaturing when tracing the lines and lineaments and weaving the strings of fortune of our hero. The recital went on to

say, "Thou shalt go flowing and easy, free and flighty, jumping and skipping, merry and melodious through life: Thou shalt play little pranks and sow thy wild oats, and yet wilt thou roll on and will not feel the burden of life: Thou shalt have no cause for remorse or repentance: Never shalt thou wish thou wert unborn or dead."

It is given but to few to bear such a fortune. Miles and miles away removed from friends and relatives, kith and kin, men like Rusi still feel that they are in their mother-land midst family ties and friendship; for they know that those bent upon maintaining and not breaking such friendship and ties can yet foster and fasten them through an effective medium or intercourse, to wit the intercourse of lively and lovely letters; letters which breathe of life and light; letters which laugh at distance, riddle at time and ridicule all estrangement and separation; letters which bring the writer and the reader *tête-à-tête* though not face to face; letters which make them feel members of the same society, children of the same family living in one and the same city or suburb, if not under one roof. It was this that made Rusi write a number of letters. When not sleeping, not talking, not reading or not writing business correspondence, not theatre-going, not singing or dancing, he wrote those lovely and lively letters which enlivened those who loved him and made their minds light and lovely as a flower:

York Street,
New York, U.S.A.,
Date, ...19—

Dearest Mag,

So here am I at last in my dream land; the land which I had not trodden before but had read much about and had seen in my dreams; the land which though last discovered, dwelt in and populated beats any ancient one in all matters and all methods; call it civilisation; call it culture; call it enlightenment; call it progress or call it the goal of all that is grand and great; all that is advancing and improving not retrograding or receding; all

that is substance not shadow ; all that is gold and no glitter.

I see you blaming me, Mag dear, for not going into ecstasy about or planting my foot on your own father-land ; the land which Walter Scott has immortalized in prose and in verse and in words which once read or heard ring in one's ears like those of the Blue Bells of Scotland. But you see, Mag, to go to Scotland without the maiden of my heart would be to lose half its relish. You remember my swearing to you more than once in joke and in earnest that Scotland shall see you and me together. Two can go there as well as one from here as from Bombay.

So here am I in Freedom Land. Though a stranger here and unacquainted with its people, I never felt more free in my life. It is all liberty without license, freedom without fetters, progress without plebeianism and plagiarism, culture without crudeness, free thinking, plain and free living, all business, all activity, all advancement and yet all mirth, merriment and 'musement. No pride and no prejudices : all equal and yet apart : all apart and yet part and parcel of one another. No dubious differences, no scepticism, nc Russianism, no Prussianism, no Bolshevism, no Germanism and no John-Bullism. We don't die over one another and bend double like the Frenchmen and yet we are not rude or impolite. No terror and terrorism. Every body and every thing at the beck and call and at the finger's end of one master mind that has worked wonders and swayed the world during the last half a decade. Go where you like, eat what you like, drink what you like, dress how you like, believe in one or many gods if you like, but only obey and honour the country's laws and its countrymen. They tell me, Mag, that throughout the progress of the world's war, Freedom Land was one scene of transformation, transplanting and traversing. It has achieved wonders and has become a wonder land. It is a proud privilege and a prerogative for a foreigner to be living in this land with the children of the

soil, breathing the same air, treading the same path, eating the same food and obeying the same laws ; advancing and improving without even knowing or feeling it. Mag dear, when I came here I found a letter waiting for me at one of the largest, perhaps the largest Post Office in the world. I would not have opened it under ordinary circumstances perhaps for hours, but the address on the cover electrified me. The handwriting was my Mag's. I cut the envelope open very gently for I did not like to be cruel with it. The letter was short but sweet, inspirating and inspiring, encouraging and emboldening, no regrets and no sorrow ; such a letter as one would like to take his cue from and carve his way out into the world.

They say " sufficient for the day is the evil thereof ". I say sufficient for the day is the pleasure thereof. I have written at random but have gained pleasure at every word. I have never been an adept in writing letters of this kind. There will be so much to write about and so much to communicate. So take this as the First Step in composition, or vocal and instrumental music. Mayhap, I shall write and speak better in my next. Write news in return—good solid news.

A thousand good wishes ; a thousand blessings ; a thousand *salaams* and a like number of kisses. We shall meet by letters until we meet here. New York is waiting to receive you with open arms. Fly, fly, to one who cannot fly back to you.

Yours for ever,
Rusi.

New York, U.S.A.,
Date,.....19—

Dear dear Mehelooji and dear dear
and still dear Chandan,

This is my bulletin No. 2 issued from New York. No. 1 bulletin issued from the same place was addressed to a young and fair lady who is the lady of my heart. She must have read

it and must have shown it to you, for I have given her *carte-blanche* to do so. She is first in my thought, first in my mind and first in my dreams ; so she had the right to the first draw.

This is New York. I shall in future call it new heaven for it is heaven itself. Four months, yes four months, have flown by and I am practically Americanised. The man who discovered this 'merica has pronounced that the name American must always exalt the pride of patriotism. I am feeling like a patriot myself. I have everything here except two—Mag and Toddy—they are both white and pure as the lily. I am glad Mag has acquired a taste and a liking for Toddy. It is better than Anti-quary. Tell her always to quaff an extra cup or two in remembrance of me.

You are a strict task-master, Mehelooji. Your friend Mr. Todd of Messrs. Todd and Tweedham of whose family I am now a member tells me that you insist on receiving regular bulletins anent me and my doings from him.

Mrs. Todd is out and out Yankee. I use the word Yankee in the same sense in which the students of Cambridge used it years ago. Anything excellent they call Yankee. Mrs. Todd tells me that the Americans used to call the New Englanders and the Anglo-Saxons, Yankees. Subsequently the tables were turned and the Americans have been honoured with that highly honourable denomination.

That fellow Jamshed and his compatriot Jal and even that little puss of a Roshan smother me with letters all addressed to their dear banished Yankee. Please pinch their ears for their pains.

How are the Bahadurshahs ? He of that name wrote to me but once. The elder she honoured me with a pretty long post-script on the same letter. But the younger she seems to have clean forgotten me. Tell her it is anything but Shirin or sweet. Tell her to obtain Mag's permission to write to me. She is sure to grant it.

That medallion of Motidana and her " life size" are ready. They are simply Yankee—*par-excellence*. Mr. Todd is displaying them at the Colonial Exhibition. They will take a month or two to go forward to you from here.

You tell me the Bahadurshahs are thinking of coming here. It has put me into semi-ecstasy. Mag must come with them. Tell her she must; for it will then be ecstasy *in toto*. Mag in canvas and cardboard must precede Mag in flesh and blood; for I want to have a medallion and a " life size" of her. Tell her if she love me as she always says she does, she must let me have them.

But ah me! What an ingrate I am? I have mercilessly left out of the list of my recollections and retrospections that simple sinless model man, Ardeshir. He must be well for he takes pretty good care to be so. All his life long he has made it his study to keep well, go about well and die well too. Dear, dear Old Father William! Wire to me the moment his matrimonial differences are made up.

Chandan, my dear sister, don't feel offended. Though a sister you have been a mother, a grandmother, an aunt, a cousin and everything to me. Your face beams on me like that of your namesake the moon. There is one, yes only one person, whom I have left out and that is Thriti; she, who is going to present a cherub to the man of her heart. I am glad, yes so glad, she is now able to go about by herself. Tell her if it be a boy to name him Rusi. He must be brought up at the Columbia University and he must win the citizenship and obtain its Freedom. If it be a girl she must be called Magdalene.

Blessings on you all, such blessings as one like me can bestow. Send me a *gadia* full of Toddy when an aeroplane is here. By the way, don't say it is an Yankee yarn, but I am told they have discovered trees here from the roots of which toddy-like juice flows freely and plentifully like larvae from the

recesses of a volcano. It is as invigorating and as wholesome they say as our Toddy. When you come over here, Mehelooji, you can judge for yourself and see if you can transplant the trees to the district of Parel in Bombay. It will be a great saving in labour as the trees deliver at the bottom without the services of a middleman and not at the top. *Salaams* and salutations. *Au-revoir.*

RUSI.

Philosophy Hall,
Columbia University,
Columbia, U.S.A.,

Date.....19—

My own dear,

I am writing this from a friend's *sanctum-sanctorum* at this University of universal fame. I have put in the first six months of my apprenticeship at Messrs. Todd and Tweedham who tell me that I shall be winning laurels in another six months. Miss Todd, for there is a Miss Todd here you know, not in this Hall but in Todd House in New York, was my partner in pranks during the first three months of my arrival here. She tells me she feels sorry at the prospect of my fast becoming a sober man of business. For a year more at least she would have liked to see me the young reprobate, mischief seeking and mischief making, always running riot, plunging into hair-brained projects and projecting safe from them. When I came here I told old Todd plain off I wanted pleasure and no parliamentary procedure for full three months. I wanted a good merry-go-round in the heart of America. I wanted a partner in my pranks. With her mother's permission Miss Todd volunteered to be one. We exchanged garbs. It was she that became the he and the he became the she. Miss Todd wanted

to see in her own words "just a wee bit of 'merican life." She wished, she said, the curse of Cain was not on her and she were born a boy. But she could dress and become one. So out we launched.

Now don't be jealous, dearest Mag, for Miss Todd could never never be Magdalene, though if you had a brother he could not have done better than wed her outright. For the matter of that there's many a Mary and many a Margaret, many a Maud and many a Magies, but not a Magdalene out here. At least I have not seen one such myself. There ! There ! you smile and feel satisfied ; don't you ? You women are more chary about the correctness of your husbands, sons or brothers when outlauding than we males are of you women. I have perfect faith in my Magdalene and I feel that she divides her attention between my letters and my likeness.

Pretty things to write you say from a student's room at the University of Columbia ! Patient student ! Havana in mouth is lounging in a cane chair slyly unconscious of my doings. I have half a mind to reward him by a partial recital of this letter, partial because even his ears will not hear the words that are for you only. By the way, Mag, I remember your injunctions and have not touched the Havana yet. I have not allowed my mouth to be "smelly". The flavour going in drives all the smell on the surface. That's what you said. Is it not ? It kills the lungs and ultimately kills life.

To take up from where I broke off. Miss Marionette, for it's by that name Miss Todd goes, and I started at street ends and stations as vendors of weeklies and dailies. The boys and girls first in the trade naturally disliked the new comers. I was now Marionette, for I went by that name and Marionette called herself Ruskin. The boys pulled and tugged at me and the girls made fun of Ruskin. They said, I had overgrown my petti-coats and must go into gowns. Really and trully Marionette's dress

is unsuitable. I was a prisoner in it but tolerated it as I wanted to look grotesque. A day there was when the boys circled round me just when the mail was in and tried to make things hot for us. Down came a cuffe from me, then another and then a third. Ruskin was fit to go into hysterics. There was a scene. Luckily, a policeman by had seen that I had lost temper under severe provocation. He came to our rescue and liberated us. As a matter of fact my temper was not up, but I wanted to show what I as the girl Marionette could do. From that day forward they were our friends and we were elected members of their association, the man as the girl and the girl as the man under assumed names. The setting of the sun always saw us home. It was such fun, such merriment, such innocent carouse when we delivered lumps of pennies and even shillings into Mrs. Todd's hands as our day's earnings. I have preserved some of these for you Mag.

A fortnight more and we bid good-bye to street ends and stations. I opened a riding school, a *kasratsala* and a *talim-khana*, something on the lines of those out there in India. Marionette said she would serve as my assistant still in boy's costume. I was no longer a girl now. My business thrived so much so that I had to refuse fresh admissions. The *kasrat* and the *talim* and the mode and the method of imparting them were novelties to these men who have muscles only waiting to develop as it were. Marionette said she felt like a boy. I had acquired the Japanese ji-jut-su. I floored so many that they all asked me to initiate them into it; Marionette included. Mr. Todd said he envied me but if things went on like that he would have no chance whatever of seeing me on the head list of his firm. I overheard him once saying to his wife that if he did not know my affections were bespoken he would have tried to secure me as Marionette's partner in life. Mrs. Todd acquiesced by solemn silence. Just then I tapped at the door rat-tat-tat to rouse attention. Don't

mind it, Mag. Marionette is nothing to me but a sister. When the riding school and the *talimkhana* were resigned to other hands there was widespread disappointment and regret. If Mehelooji come here he can make heaps of money out of it. Enough for the day. I am getting hungry and if I continue the letter the dinner will be too cold for digestion. My heart goes out to you Mag. The absence of your presence is the only void in it. I expect a little Bo-peep from you to-day.

Yours for ever,
Rusi.

Macgregor Lodge,
Bellasis Road, Byculla,
Bombay,.....19—

Dearest Rusi,

Since you left, Bombay is in the throes of excitement—social, educational, religious, political and what not ? The termination of the war has given promise of new life and light to all countries and it is no wonder that India is not backward. But I am not supposed to write a dissertation on these doings. I reserve it until the time, equality of sexes is established. You tell us that besides you there are two other Parsis in your Freedom Land ; one a student of religion and philosophy and another a merchant. The student you say is no longer a student but is now a Doctor of Philosophy. He is preparing to return to the land of his birth. May I know, young sir, who has advised him to do so ? Your community is surely not dying to receive him or men like him. The greater the learning and the greater the erudition the less the appreciation and the larger the chances of starvation. There will be no chaise and pair and deputation elect waiting for him at the steamer or the station. The few that will welcome him to-day and blow his trumpet in their columns will be the very ones to take him by the leg and bring him down from the

topmost ladder to-morrow—the very ones to laugh at and to make fun of him—the very ones to talk of his American polish and his German varnish.

You know young sir—my fine American citizen as you call yourself though you have no right to do so, I have always been in love with your community but not with what they do and what they avoid doing in the name of charity, religion and *revaj* or custom. I was always a true Christian and meant to remain one until, yes, until a young Parsi came to steal my heart from me. A little bird has ever since then been fluttering at that heart and telling and reminding me that my duty and my inclinations should be now entirely by the side of my husband to be. I have gained some knowledge of his faith and I must now work and initiate myself fully into its principles. May be in course of time I might come to be a Zorastrian, a better Zorastrian than many of you are. I think there can be no union of souls true and entire without the union of religion. Without such complete unity there will be undesirable and unpleasant little conflicts.

I wrote to one of your *Dastoors*, one of the biggest of the lot, who goes about dressed in long white robes and shawls and preaches homilies, occasionally springing up from his *divan* like a jack in the box and inquired of him if he would kindly undertake to instruct and initiate me in the tenets and truisms of Zoraster. There was no reply for a month, so I sent a reminder ; then another and then a third ; but the *Dastoor Saheb* was determined to hold his peace. I then wrote to another, another who is said to be always in competition for secular supremacy with the first, but that appeal shared the same fate. I appealed to a third and it elicited the following reply after a month's delay during which the pious memory of this Parsi Pope was four times purged of its lethargy in the shape of what you men call reminders :—

Ridge Road,
Cumballa Hill,
Bombay,.....19—

Dear Madam,

Your letter of the 1st ultimo and subsequent reminders have all found me. You inquire if I would undertake to instruct and initiate you into the tenets and truisms of Zoraster. My reply is that I am sorry I cannot do so. I am also sorry I cannot assign reasons for this refusal.

Yours, &c.

This, Rusi dear, was a poser and a facer, but your Magdalene was not to be daunted. She would not be fit to be her Rusi's fiancee if she were. So, I set the Malabar Hill working machinery into motion. The machinery which has the afflux of money, which is both power and influence. I went to Mr. Behman Bahadurshah, who consulted his neighbour Mr. Poonawala, who confabulated with Mr. Thanawala and in the end they laid siege to and subjugated the *Dastoor Saheb* in white robes. I remember your telling me Rusi in your usual funny way that the *Dastoors*, were born without legs and walk upon other peoples' feet. At any rate they conceal their own legs under their white robes just as that dear *Dastoor* concealed his reasons for refusing to comply with my request. I remember your telling me that these *Dastoors*, dear delightful as they are, have as proteges men of material worth and money who are their silk and satin clients. So the *Dastoor* yielded, yielded not willingly but at discretion. He would not, he said, commit himself by committing things to paper. He would not condescend to go to my house nor bemean himself so far as to allow me to cross the sacred threshold of his own. He would meet me at Bahadur Mahal and impart to me such knowledge or instructions as I may require

about the tenets of Zoraster and solve my doubts and difficulties. There were no less than half a dozen meetings. They were family meetings where a few select friends were invited.

There ! Rusi dear, Papa is calling for me. In the interest of writing I forget to look at my little tic-tic, that dear little thing which is a present from and reminds me dearly of some one far off. It is nigh upon eight. Poor Papa ! His toast and *kunji* must be so very cold and congested ! But no matter I'll prepare another for him in a trice.

Yours for ever,
MAG.

Todd Mansion,
High Bridge Street,
New York,.....19—

My darling Mag,

Delighted to receive yours containing part account of your adventures with the Parsi High Priest. I admire them. Take my advice and don't, under any circumstances, loosen your hold over him. Hold him fast by his full-blown neck or he will give you a slip and a go-by. I am waiting for further accounts.

One good turn deserves another. I know how anxious you must be to hear more of our exploits.

I think I broke off at the *kasratsala* and *talimkhana*. When they were resigned we were much put about ; I mean, I and my partner in merriment for fresh fields of amusement. We set our heads together and Marionette suddenly suggested something. " The stage, the stage, a kingdom for a stage, my boy," she said, in such a fine manly tone almost Shakespearean that I burst out laughing and had to hold my sides tight to prevent them from splitting.

" The stage to be sure," I said, " but we have no kingdom to give for it and besides, I doubt Marionette, if the old folks, I

mean your parents will allow it."

"Oh ! Tut ! " she said. "You need not worry about it. Their pulse is in my hands. I know how to manage them. Only see how I do it. Now tell me how we should act. Is it to be the circus or the theatre. Select which we will you Monsieur and I must be together. I know you must be afraid of your fiancee but I'll write to her and put her mind at ease. I don't mean to dethrone her. Oh ! How I wish she were here to help us." Ultimately we decided that it was to be the circus first and then the theatre. The rehearsal was to be in Mr. and Mrs. Todd's *salon*. I had told Marionette that she will have to go through her *debut* there. The old couple were seated at a table, the masculine comfortably turning over the pages of a newspaper and glaring at it through his specs ; the feminine busy knitting her stockings. I stood near the door and my assistant went in without the old people seeing her. She bestowed a gentle tap on his head observing, "O Dad, dear dear Dad, I have just been telling the Parsi gentleman from Bombay that he can't find a Dad like mine in the world. If he expects to find another one here he will have to wait till he is as old as Dad and not even then." This speech took a few moments to deliver at each of which the speaker was drawn closer and closer into the extended arms of the listener until at the end she was fairly locked in them. Gently unlocking herself the speaker approached the feminine parent. "Oh Mama," she said, "a thousand excuses ! I did not know, little Goosie as I am, you were here. Come ! Come ! Put aside this," she said, taking the stockings from her hands. "I have plenty of them and have plenty of money to buy more. Ah ! Ma ! How nice you look to-day ! The Parsi gentleman says there is not a face and figure like yours in the whole of Bombay. I had ventured to doubt it but now that I bethink me, the gentleman is right. You never did look better in your life. You are looking your best. You are full fifty and look but five

and thirty. By the way, Ma, now that I bethink me what a fine stocking it is ; such a one as I never set my eyes on before. A stocking for a Madonna, a Prima-donna you might say. It would grace the leg of any stage *Huri*. It will make a name for you if worn in a circus. The texture is Yankee, I mean, superb. The colours are simply lovely. Ma, do finish it up. I shall wear it in the circus."

" To be sure my dear," said the Ma, " but how will they know of your wearing that stocking? There will be such a crowd there, I mean, in the auditorium, and you surely cannot be so indelicate as to be intentionally exposing it."

" Your mother is right darling," said the Dad.

" Oh ! Daddy ! " return the Dad's darling, " I don't mean to be in the auditorium at all. I shall be in the arena ; on the stage you know."

" We know ! " exclaimed the couple jumping out of their chairs. " We know ! Why dear we know nothing of the kind. People who go to see the circus sit in the boxes and not in the arena or on the stage. You surely don't mean that — that —"

" I do mean, Pa dear, I do mean to say, Ma dear, that I am going to be a player and a singer in the Great American Circus, if for nothing else just to show that there is a lady in Freedom Land who can work a stocking the worth of which will be the buying price of the entire interest or monopoly of the American Stock Exchange."

The Ma and the Pa, Mag dear, stood petrified. I did the same when quietly listening at the door. But you need not do it Mag when reading this letter. It was the Pa that found his tongue and gathered enough breath to speak. " If that Parsi advised you to do it Marionette, he shall pay for it. I shall pack him off this minute, yes this minute, bag and baggage to Bombay." Down came the nervous weak-looking fist on the table with a thud. The proprietor

of the hand not being accustomed to such feats pressed it gently by the other as if feeling pain. His other property, the American Damsel, in holiday attire, knew how to work up a certain advantage. She took the pain-stricken hand in her own, pressed it to her lips and covered it with kisses. At the same time there were tears. I will not undertake to say if they were artificial ; for there was nothing at all artificial about the girl and pain to her father meant pain to her.

" Oh ! Pa ! " she said, " don't blame the Parsi. He never did it. He would not hear of it. It was I that suggested it and invoked his assistance. He promised help provided I have your permission. And what a name and fame, reputation and respect, honour and emoluments, it will find for Ma ! Every body will be asking who made that stocking. Besides, only the other day you said if you could open a stocking manufactory you would make a fortune. I interposed then that my Pa has made so many fortunes already—enough to maintain and to give in marriage a hundred such useless lumbers like me—that he hardly needs to make any more. But sure enough you shall open a stocking manufactory now. You can employ agents or enjoy the royalty. That young Parsi as you call him will help you." Mag dear, I was watching the old couple's physiognomies closely. They were all smiles and sweet scent.

" But what about the circus, my dear ? How can your Pa agree to it? " gently put in the Ma.

" Oh ! Pa must agree to it. Only the other day he said Mr. Timkin of the ' Great American ' is simply a brick, a *pucca* burnt brick, a thorough-bred, every inch of him a gent, an out and out gent ; and as to his circus why Pa you'll remember your telling me that it's the very soul of respectability and that you would not object even if a daughter of yours were to be on the board of it. Now that daughter prays to the Pa on her knees to prove the sincerity of his words."

" Rise my daughter, rise," whimpered old Todd. " I cannot bear to see you so. You may go to the circus, go anywhere provided you remain your father's daughter and do credit to your parents and yourself. Remember Marionette you are and you must remain for ever a Mignonette and always keep nice and sweet. Your earnings must go to charity. But where is that young Parsi ? Oh here he is ! Come in ! Come in ! You need not knock," cried the girl as if she had just seen the Parsi approaching and preparing to knock. Todd, Todd the wealthy American, the millionaire, the mighty man of business, rich but never glorying in riches, luxuriant but not wasteful, elegant and yet plain, polite and not proud, strong but soft, bold but nervous, free and generous, always doing, all active and industrious, amassing but never forgetting the needy, bowed a very gracious bow and did royal welcome to his guest. " Hey-day, young sir, hey-day, a fine day, how nice you look, upon my soul, never saw a better looking fellow in my life. Why, I was not a tithe like you even at four and twenty. I have read of your race, read of Persia, young sir, let me tell you that I have read of Persia and its Shahs ; its heroes and its *huries* ; its bold doings and its brave fighting ; its days of valour, honour and glory. I have read of these, young sir, and more, read a deal about that glorious prophet of yours and his great creed all with our renowned Professor Jackson in my young days. Don't look surprised, young man, don't. If not in Persian I have read it all in English. What I could not find there I found in those books of the butchers, the Germans, you know than whom no better scholars exist. Mayhap, master Rusi, mayhap, you will teach me a bit of Persian. Glad, so glad you have studied it, aye mastered it. Forgetting one's mother-tongue is forgetting one's mother-land. Forgetting both means, remember young sir, it means forgetting ones own self, more it means forgetting race feeling, forgetting the

pride and prestige of race, forgetting honour, forgetting courage, forgetting enterprise, culture, progress, religion and even morals."

"Todd dear, you are preaching just like a Parson," gently remonstrated Mr. Todd's spouse who was getting tired of it.

"Just like a Parson, my dear ! You know it's in the family. Your great-grandfather's uncle's son-in-law was a Parson I am told, and so was one of your second cousins and so was—"

"Enough ! I don't know if there are Parsons in the family," said Mrs. Todd ; "but if there be any I only hope they are not like the present-day Parsi Parsons, the *Dastoors*, this young friend of ours has told us of."

"So Mr. Rusi you say Firdausi spent 30 years of his life and toiled and moiled in writing the Shah Nameh to make Persia known amongst the Parsis. It is a pity to think that his labours are as ill-requited now as they were then. His king offered him silver pieces instead of gold ones. You Parsis gave him nothing, you say, though they prate and prattle in season and out, about his glorious work. All honour to him. I wish a poet like that be born to our country ; the country, my good sir, that in the words of the English poet has the proud privilege and the prerogative of rearing to freedom an undaunted race, hospitable and kind. I only wish, sir, your rulers that be and their neighbours will never forget what this land, its President and its people have done for them. That President of ours, sir, carries on his solitary shoulders the heads of all the master-minds in the world. So you are going to take this flower of mine, this Mignonette, to the circus. The circus, sir, is in itself a miniature republic if not a miniature world. It requires a strong hand like that of our friend Timkin to rule it. It's only by way of a pastime for a month or two. Take her, sir, take her. I know you are a gentleman and so is Timkin. I can rely on you both."

Mag dear this letter of mine is simply prodigious. I must cut it. Timkin was overjoyed. He had a great faith in the efficacy of advertisements. Once he launched into them he never stopped till he had seen them to the end. So a day or two after, the following advertisement adorned the best space in the New York papers and caught all the best and bad eyes of the largest number. Boys carrying placards marched through the principal streets and handbills in big letters were posted at the best corners of bylanes and streets :

BOMBAY IN NEW YORK : PERSIA IN AMERICA :

Come and see the Parsi from Bombay :

Come and see the Oostad : See the Talimbaj and his Talim :

Mr. Rus the scion of the famous race of Rustom *Pahelvan* of Persia will make his first appearance at the

GREAT AMERICAN

on Monday next and bring you all at his feet

Come and see the Pahelvan beat your best athlets :

He'll make them lick the dust before your very eyes :

BOMBAY IN NEW YORK : PERSIA IN AMERICA :

He Rusi of Indian fame will be assisted by a New York maiden who will bring the audience down with her and dance, skip, jump, sing and play the heroine with the Indian hero :

DON'T LOSE TIME :

See the plans and book your seats at once :

The hero and the heroine will give away all their earnings in charity.

Mag it would fill papers if I go on. Those who have been here and known its people will understand it all. You will realize

it when you are here. Timkin's Circus ran a roaring trade and at the end of a month and a half old Todd had the pleasure of giving away our earnings amounting to £ 1,000 into the New York Foundling Hospital.

Yours for ever,
Rusi.

Macgregor Lodge,
Bellasis Road, Byculla,
Bombay,.....19—

Dearest Rusi,

Your letter about the circus was an immense treat. Pa and I have enjoyed it hugely. Reading your letters is like seeing my Rusi in the midst of his surroundings. I am not jealous of your Mignonette. If I am, it is only because she is now where I should be. But better she be by your side than nobody at all.

Poor dear Papa! I have kept it from you so long, dearest, but I cannot do it any longer. Papa is going down, steadily down, the abyss of life. There is no mistaking it. I see it in his face, read it in his eyes, hear it in his speech and trace it in his actions. He is a marked man—the inexorable hand of Death is on him unless I am mistaken for I have heard of and even seen cases in which death was imminent, the hand of God averted it.

" Magdalene, my darling," said he to me only yesterday, " I dont' want to frighten you, Lassie, but I feel that I am doomed. I don't fear death for I am prepared to meet it. All my fears are about you. I now repent having parted you and Rusi and allowed him to go without you. I should have gone with you both and boldly met the monster fate in America. My dear when you are of my age you will understand it all. If a man cannot give up the ghost in his native land, he likes to do so in the place where he may have spent the best years of his

life. Mag, Maggie, my own daughter, my child, promise me that within a month of my interment you will leave for America. It is for this that I have induced the Bahadurshahs to postpone their departure. Tell Rusi, darling, that my thoughts are for you and for him only. Though born of an alien race I feel drawn to him like a father. I doubt not he'll make you happy. Give up everything Mag, everything even your religion if needs be to make the man of your choice happy ; for all religions are the same. Only the propounders appeared to the people in different forms. If by adopting another religion one become a better man or a better woman and is a better member of society let them give up their own. I have been a true Christian and yet my respect and admiration for the purity and simplicity of Rusi's faith as propounded by Zoraster, not as preached and practised by some of his priests and his peeple, are great."

Rusi dear, Silla is getting very strange. In fact, she has been so ever since she was with us last at Mehelooji's on that blessed day which you and I will ever cherish as the brightest and the happiest in our lives. Something surely has come over her though what that something is I cannot say. It seemed to me at first that she was taciturn and reserved and avoided me studiously. Latterly as if feeling she was in the wrong she has been near me often enough and mixed with me and talked to me but not so freely and frankly as before. She rarely, if ever, speaks of you or even refers to you. What does this mean ? Can you tell me ? I have sounded her parents about it. They do not contradict me but they set it down to the credit of caprice. They say all girls have such moods some time or other in their lives. For myself I don't think I have ever had it. But let that pass. I don't think I should have troubled you about it.

I am to meet Dastoor D— at the Bahadurshahs' day after

to-morrow. There is to be quite a little social gathering, a sort of a conversazione, you know. I shall report it *in-extenso* to you, my lord and master, as in duty bound and await your opinion.

O Rusi ! Rusi ! How I long to be with you ! It seems as if we are world's apart and never could meet ; as if all that route is dreary desert and quite intraversable ; as if the sea is all turned ice and the steamers all water logged. What could it all mean, Rusi ? Silly sentimentality you will say. I have tried to think so too, but somehow the thought sticks to me in spite of myself.

Believe me for ever,
your own,
Mag.

Todd Mansion,
New York,
Date.....19—

Dearest Mag,

Your last made me so rueful. I got it late in the evening on our return from Mr. Hopkin How's-he. I sat all solitary and read it ; read it once, twice and thrice and it was not till then that I could feel the full force of it. Like close personal contact letters from those we like and love have the power, the magnetism to make us happy or miserable. Your words sounded mournful and I sat myself to find out why you should be so low-down in spirits. We all follow each other like kings in the order of succession. There are exceptions, but exceptions are not the rule. The rule is that the old die first and then the young though to the mind of an offspring its parents though ever so old are never so old. *Mutatis mutandis* a sixty years old father of a family is taken to be and put down as a child by his eighty years old parents. This is the way we go and if you look at it as I do, this is the way, Mag dear, to be happy

and gay. A child loving and affectionate would give its life to save that of a father or a mother. And so would its parents to save the child. But you see darling the All-wise has willed otherwise. If one has to go, one will and not even a daughter, a model daughter like my own Mag, can stay it. Here at this long distance I feel that your father is not doomed but is destined to go to America where he is so badly wanted by his son-in-law elect.

As to your thinking of routes turning dreary and waste, seas turning ice and steamers lying stock still, darling, I put it all down to the credit of earnest love and affection. Though miles apart we are but one body and one soul. You remember the trite old Parsi saying, not even the clumsiest of cudgels can separate the waters of the sea. I want to rid you of your clouds Mag, so I'll introduce you off-hand to our friend Mr. Hopkin How's-he. He is the proprietor of one of the premier play-houses extant here. He always hops about and therefore takes so well after his first name. His second name is said to have had its origin in a sort of habit of constantly inquiring after other people's health. Mrs. How's-he is a soul to see but not to admire. Her husband has never admitted it in public but is said to have let it out in confidence when in his cups that if she were not a little deaf she would have been quite a terror. No master How's-he has blessed the union ; but a Miss How's-he has been pleased to do so. She serves as son, daughter, son-in-law, and daughter-in-law and well keeps the place of twenty. She is always irritable, always excited, always sulky and peevish, always in hysterics and always going to faint. It is in this way that she manages to keep her old parents, especially the tender one, on the tip-toe and tenter-hooks of anxiety. You will follow me Mag into the privacy of the happy family. Mr. How's-he owns a troop and a theatre, a dramatic company of which even the Palais Royal can be well proud. You know

Mag our last coup was to be the theatre. I and Marionette *alias* Mignonette carried a letter of recommendation to How's-he from the very respectable author of her being. The three were there discussing the evening toast and tea. We were admitted to their presence as a matter of grace. How's-he was for inviting us to partake but a side look at his tender one told him that he should desist. We pretended to feel warm and went to the window. Tea over, How's-he read old Todd's letter and then handed it to his wife who hated the very sight of youth and beauty, health and harmony, wherever noticeable, like poison.

"So you want to be dramatists, do you?" she said. "You want my husband to give you a trial. Todd should have better sense. What has the theatre How's-he to do with amateurs? Hopkin," she said, turning to him "you surely don't want to ruin your reputation."

"But my dear— "

"Don't my dear me. You know I never like it especially before young people. It is this sort of thing that makes them carry on that game of hide and seek when they should be at their lessons. It may be *à la* Francé but surely not *à la* 'merica. Well Miss what's your name?"

"My name," said the Miss so addressed, "La Mam, it's Miss Merrygold."

"Then you are English?"

"I a'n't that."

"Then you are Scottish?"

"La Mam, that I be not."

"Then you are Irish?"

"Nay Madam, I am a born and bred Yankee."

Mr. How's-he seeing the rising ire of his spouse thought it better to interpose.

"My dear this young lady is Miss Marionette Todd, the

daughter of my friend Mr. Todd of Messrs. Todd & Tweedham, the famous iron-mongers and machine manufacturers of New York."

"Horrible! Mama horrible! Why don't you send her away? She has been here too long and telling such lies too," said or rather shrieked the wise Mama's wiser daughter.

"Audible! Quite audible as you say my dear!" replied the Ma.

"Don't excite yourself, my dear, or you will faint," said Mr. Hopkin.

"And who may you be, young fellow, you cannot be a Yankee. There is nothing of that in your face," said Mrs. Hopkin.

"Venerable lady" responded I, "I honour you. I am not an American but I mean to become one before long. I am from Bombay."

"From doomsday!"

"No, my dear, Bombay," replied Hopkin, and he spelt the word througb, for his dear lady's edification. "Bombay is the principal city in India; the second city in the whole of the British Dominions; the *Urbs prima in Indis* they call it."

"Oh! Horrible!" shrieked the heiress Miss How's-he.

"Horrible indeed!" shrieked the Ma. "India, that country of horrors and terrors where I am told the wilds immeasurably spread and seem lengthening as they go: Where the faithless phantoms lure the unwary traveller to his doom: Where the rats they say are as big as cats, the cats bigger than the dogs and the dogs as big as calves and the calves—"

"Mama, Mama, mother, for God's sake hold your peace. You should not have raised that picture before my eyes. Send this wild Indian away or I shall faint," shrieked the heiress.

"Don't do it! Don't do it here! my darling! Just wait till you are safe in your seclusion. When there, you know you can always faint away at your leisure. Hopkins! Hopkins!

Don't look like an owl. I hate owls. Don't stare at me. It gives me the palsy. There ! Get up, conduct that darling to her room," howled the female parent.

" Madam " I said " if you will permit me I should like to be the discharger of that very delicate function. I am not a wild Indian. I am a Parsi. I know how to deal and how to behave with young ladies."

" O ! You are a Parsi ! Then you must be from Paris young man ? I don't like the looks of that hussie there ; but I think I am beginning to like yours. Yes you may—"

The young man from Paris was too shrewd to wait till he had heard more. He rose, bowed low, low low down to the very ground to the young American heiress who was called the American beauty by no one else but by Mr. Hopkins How's-he's hangers-on and offered his hand to her. In fact his hand was in hers and he was leading her or rather she was leading him to the inner apartment before the mistress of the house could raise any objection.

Mag darling what do you think ? Miss Hopkins did not take me to her own room but through a back door into the garden. Thence through another back door into the conservatory. She excused herself by saying that the fresh air of the garden always refreshed her and restored her and composed her and calmed her and quieted her and soothed her and—and—said she drawing a deep deep sigh solaced her too : solaced her for the loss of a sister who had died when only six months old and for the loss of a brother who had lived but six days after birth ; solaced her for all the want of a companion. I tried Mag to loosen my hand and get free but she would not allow it until we were actually in the conservatory fairly preserved and conserved. When comfortably settled on a bench I had no difficulty in making up my mind as to my fair charge's health, her temperament and all about her. The all was artificial from the

head to the neck ; from the neck down to the feet. Her health seemed to be excellent. She has very ordinary looks but she is certainly not ungainly. At any rate she could well dispense with the artificialities for another fifteen years. The conservatory is at the farthest end of the garden. Hopkins has made it all that mind and money could do. There is an electric bell connection between the house and the conservatory. A button was pressed and in ten minutes a tray with delicious viands was presented. I was hungry as a wolf. I consigned, yes I confess, I consigned Miss How's-he mentally to the winds and fell to, voraciously to do justice to the repast. Whilst so doing, I was glancing furtively at the young lady seated by me. It seemed to me that she had drawn closer to me, closer than first acquaintance and delicacy warranted ; but doubtless she thought I was her six days' old brother who had suddenly come to life after spending full thirty years in heaven to see his dear dear sister. She was looking at me admiringly, perhaps she wished she had an appetite like mine. It seemed to have just then taken birth for she ate and drank in a way as only Yankee girls can do. All this comes, dearest Mag, of making prisoner of an only daughter and forcing her to spend all her life within the four corners of the parental lock-up. I don't want to offend you Mag, but it seemed to me that if a parson were there or for the matter of that even our great Dastoor D—, Miss How's-he would have asked him to take such steps as may be necessary to lock me up in the house with her for ever. At such a distance from Bombay, our High Priest would, of course, have no such scruples or delicate dictates of conscience such as the Bombay weather engenders. Another ten minutes and just when I had managed to disengage Miss How's-he's left hand which had creeped over my right, How's-he appeared in view. I thought my eyes deceived me. He had Mrs. How's-he on his right and Miss Todd on his left and was

leading them to the conservatory like a gallant. His face was now quiet clear. It was a proof that the domestic clouds had dispersed and that clear weather had set in. In nine cases out of ten such disputes are only ephemeral and vanish as rapidly as they arise.

When money runs free, there must be somebody to spend it. Men earn in the perspiration of their brow and women spend in tableau and toilet. Mr. How's-he was a man of business. He had no temptations and work was his only pleasure, so much so that he never thought of looking after his only daughter and left her entirely to her mother. The mother having begun at the lowest rung of the ladder with her husband was unable to befit her daughter for the high station in life which they now occupy. Large fortunes unenjoyed go to benefit those who never help to make them. How's-he's piles showed that they would share the same fate. On the daughter's disappearance the husband and wife had regained their composure. Just then a servant came in and informed Mrs. How's-he in reply to her inquiry that her young lady was not in her bed but in the conservatory. Mrs. How's-he took a big jump, caught Mr. How's-he by the arm and dragged him out of the room. Mr. How's-he offered no opposition but obeyed only taking care to beckon Miss Todd to join them and so they were there.

"My dear," said Mrs. How's-he, "I thought you had retired to your room."

"La Ma, it was so stuffy there; it would have made me worse so I thought I had better go to the conservatory. I am glad I did so for I have found out that this young gent has nothing of the wild Indian about him. As to that young lady there, I know nothing of her. I wish Ma you would give them free passport to our stage. I should like to go too, if —if— Mr. Parsi here—"

"Mr. Rustom," suggested Mr. How's-he.

"Yes, if Mr. Rustom will take me there," finished the daughter.

"You forget yourself, my dear, Mr. Rustom is entirely a stranger to us. I am sorry you forget all dictates of delicacy though I have taken special good care to impress them on you ever since you were a babe and I a-rocking you at your cradle," lectured the Lady-mother.

"I'll accept no refusal, Ma. If this gent cannot take me, Pa must do so. You have kept me long enough at home. I must see a little of life, yes that I must. I am like a bird locked up in a cage, never singing but mopping all day. I must fly a bit now."

"Wifie," ventured forth Mr. How's-he, "the child is right: Was never so much right in her life: Let her go out with me: Rely on it she shall never go wrong: I am getting old and want an assistant; Mayhap she will assist me and make a good match in time."

So, Mag dear, one young gent to two young ladies. Mrs. How's-he gave way for she was not so bad after all and we were on the stage for full three months. How's-he drew immense audience. Miss How's-he has the making of an actress in her and her talents show sign of development. Three months and we left the stage—I and Miss Todd. Miss How's-he does not intend to do so. On my life she is a different girl now. All her energies and abilities are now on the surface. This, dear Mag, ended my term of holiday-making. I am now as you are aware with Todd & Tweedham—a sober man of business working for his salvation, collecting money but not knowing why or to what end. Old Todd cannot overwork me. Punctually at five, though I worked till six, my orderlies have orders to run up the small board on the wall facing my table. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. This is painted in bold letters on

the board. The first day Todd came in to trouble me after five. His eyes caught the above words. He fell into a chair and said he had merely looked in to see if I was still in mine; that if I did not mind I could take the ladies out for an airing in his comfortable cabriolette.

"But you must have come for some important business Mr. Todd," I observed soberly. Mr. Todd must have caught the smile on my lips and felt that it was a cut. But he said calmly, "Oh never mind that Mr. Rustom; we are all born for work but should not allow it to rule supreme over us. We eat to live and not live to eat. There, lad," he said turning to the office-boy, "put up the shutters and see to the closing. Your master must leave now." So we went out arm in arm and into the cabriolette. Tweedham met us before the coachman could start the horses. He was surprised to see Todd in the cab. "Where to! Where to! So early Toddy," questioned Mr. Tweedham. "Hope there is nothing wrong. I am just returning from peck and poodle. I expected to find you in your chair."

Poor Todd! He himself did not know why he was in the *gharry* or whither he was bound. I saw his embarrassment and came to his rescue. "Mr. Tweedham, Sir, Dr. Smith says Mr. Todd is not well. Least-ways he mentioned this to Mrs. Todd. 'Mrs. Todd,' he said, 'your husband looks pale and worried. You are overworking him. He wants plenty of open air, so you must take him out daily after six'." It was a white lie but well meant and well aimed. Mrs. Todd did not contradict me. Old Todd swallowed it and so did Tweedham. Miss Todd looked merrier than usual. Her eyes chuckled and she tittered. She seemed to be choking with suppressed laughter. Mrs. Todd noticed it.

"Oh! that's it! Is it!" said Tweedham scratching his head and doubtful if he was in his senses.

The coachman felt the string pulled, crack crack sounded

the whip, the horses reared and started and off went the carriage leaving old Tweedham ruminating and wending his way slowly towards the office steps not so much as bestowing a glance at the doors and windows which were filled with employes looking curiously at this singular occurrence. From that day forward Todd & Tweedham close punctually at six.

Yours for ever,

Rusi.

Macgregor Lodge,
Bellasis Road, Byculla,
Bombay, ...19—

Dearest Rusi,

Here is a brief account of my interview with your Dastoor Dehkan (if you like omit the 'y' from 'your' and make it 'our'). The *Dastoor Saheb* glowing in all the glory of his grandeur and duly invested with the woollen shawl of his sacred investiture arrived in his own *gharry* and entered the council hall at Bahadur Mahal where he was to preside. There were the Bahadurshahs, there were the Meheloojis and there were the dear indispensable the rest of them Thriti and Jamshed, Jal and Roshan and dear old Ardeshir. There was a shaking of hands all round and a few introductions. It came to my turn last. His Holiness knew me but we were never formally introduced. Mr. Behman performed that ceremony in his usual stately way.

"Miss Macgregor, daughter of Mr. John Macgregor of the well-known firm of Messrs. Macgregor and Patel of London and Bombay, *Dastoor Saheb*."

"Miss Macgregor, this is our *Dastoor Saheb* Dehkan. He is so well known to one and all in Bombay and to the whole of the Zorastrian world of which you are practically a member that I think it hardly necessary to tell you of him at greater length." I was ready with my hand. The *Dastoor Saheb* seemed

wavering but only for a trice during which Mr. Behman Bahadurshah kept his large telling eyes, which as you know have not yet lost their lustre, fixed on him. His Holiness appeared to wince under them. He extended his hand, took mine in it and shook it heartily. "I am so pleased to know you, Miss Macgregor," he said, "so very pleased that I can hardly describe it. I have known your old father for long and I knew your good uncle too; had occasional bits and snatches of very interesting converse with them. It is my good fortune to-day to ratify that friendship by a formal introduction with you."

I watched to see if the *Dastoor Saheb* would clean his right hand which had enclosed that of a *Juddin* by his pure white garment or his fine silken kerchief. But he did neither. He only adjusted and arranged his shawl which was slightly disarranged and drew it closer to him, may be to protect himself. He then seated himself into a beautifully carved old mahogany chair which belonged to Mr. Behman's ancestors and which looked like a *dais* for crowning kings and queens.

"*Dastoor Saheb*," said Mr. Behman, "we have some questions to put to you."

"A thousand if you like, my good sir," replied the *Dastoor*, bowing obsequiously.

"A thousand thanks. You know *Dastoor Saheb* why I have troubled you to be here to-day. It is to have the pleasure of your pious company and principally that you may answer a few questions which this young lady here desires to put to you, *Dastoor Saheb*."

The prelate so addressed again bowed low in solemn acquiescence.

"This young lady," proceeded Mr. Behman, "though a Christian all her life is almost a Parsi for she has lived with, dressed like and associated with the Parsis as if she were one of them. Though a Christian she has tried to gain an insight

into our religion and I may assure you, my dear *Dastoor Saheb*, that she understands it better and observes it, except in the matter of its outward symbols, better than many who call themselves Zorastrians. You cannot be aware *Dastoor Saheb* that she is formally betrothed to Bai Chandan's brother, Mr. Rustom Delaver, who is now in America."

" To be sure, *Meherban Saheb*, gracious lord, I know all that and I am glad of it for I have known Mr. Rustom from infancy upwards and have liked and loved him. He is a man after my heart. He is just what I should like to have been if I had been born a *Behdin* (layman). I often question myself, Bahadurshah Seth, if it had not been for the best for me to have taken birth in a *Behdin* family for then I should have been more natural and more free to think, to speak and to act for myself than I am in my present birth and berth."

" Then why not exchange positions, *Dastoor Saheb*, with one of us, say for instance with friend Behman," observed Mr. Mehelooji.

" That I would by my life and soul," said the *Dastoor*, " if Behmanji Seth would only allow it."

" For that my learned friend and I will have to be born again," said Mr. Bahadurshah. " We must wait till then."

" Dastoor Dehkan," said Mr. Behman, " some of you, amongst whom, I believe, you are one, have put forward a *Fatva* that contact of any kind with a *Juddin* of whatever caste, colour or creed is contamination. You have just been good enough (' gracious enough,' put in Ardeshir) to shake hands with this young lady here. Don't you think you are contaminated? Your contamination must mean that of your family for you will go and mix with them. It must also mean that the sacred ceremonies and rituals essential to the practice of religious functions which you have undergone have become *Riman* or unsanctimonious. If so, this lady here has done you incalculable harm."

"Dastoor Dehkan must have cleaned out the contamination in some secret manner unbeknown to us," observed Ardeshir. "*Dastoors* can work wonders. Dastoor Dehkan of Persian fame who was known as Daneshwar Dehkan and whose pious name our *Dastoor* here bears is said to have exercised vast influence over his king and his country by his wisdom and his learning."

"Will not our *Dastoor Saheb* here kindly tell us if Dehkan has any meaning," inquired I. "Dear Ru—('your dear Rusi,' finished Mr. Bahadurshah) yes Rusi told me that in ordinary parlance Dehkan means a boor, a villager, but that in olden times it meant much more. Our *Dastoor Saheb* here will perhaps enlighten us as to this."

"With the greatest pleasure," said the *Dastoor*. "Dastoor Dehkan lived in the times of the last of the Persian Shahs, Yezdezar Sheriar. He was as wise as he was learned, and versed in all the finest arts of the time. He was the Shah's adviser in matters spiritual as well as temporal. He it was that advised Shah Yezdezar to accept the creed of Zoraster. I am proud, my dear young lady, proud to bear his illustrious name. Dehkan also meant in olden times a peasant, a cultivator, a high official of state, a satrap or a bard."

"But," I innocently observed, "if Dehkan has so many meanings, how is one to know what a particular individual bearing that name is or how his vocation is to be distinguished?"

"I'll tell you that also, Miss Macgregor," said the *Dastoor*. "You can distinguish it in two ways: Dress and deeds."

"No offence meant to you, *Dastoor Saheb,*" said I. "I am only generalising. When a person says he is a *Dastoor* and dresses like one but his thoughts, his words and his deeds are the exact opposite of those of Dastoor Dehkan of illustrious fame he is no more a *Dastoor* than I. He is worse than a villager. On the

other hand the innocent villager who has the qualifications of Dastoor Dehkan in however crude or insignificant a form is a Dastoor Dehkan within that meaning of the word. Am not I right, *Dastoor Saheb* ? "

" To be sure, you are. I could not have explained it better myself, my dear young lady. I know you will now ask me what I mean to do in regard to the alleged contamination." The *Dastoor Saheb* said this laughing and the others laughed too. He is a clever man, clever in his erudition and as clever in the tactics of evading and misapplying it. " Any idea, my dear young lady," he said, " has its origin in one's wit or fancy. After it is once born there, it becomes a thought and the wise man is he who can decide whether that thought should be converted into action or not. In this matter both the *Behdin* and the *Dastoor* are on the same level. You know our religion is based on the foundations of purity and virtue. When a man of my own community comes to me I am not inclined to shake hands with him or to offer him a seat unless I find that he is clean and tidy. The distaste to touch *Juddins* had its origin in the same. The majority of them however rich are not so clean and tidy as we Zorastrians are. There is the same objection in shaking hands with an unclean Parsi as with an unclean Hindu or Mahomedan. No one can be unclean unless he is ignorant or means to be so. The ignorant Parsi has therefore taken it up that shaking hands with a *Juddin* or asking him to sit on a *galicha* or a *patherna* during times of ceremonies is contamination and abomination. The belief of ages, my dear young lady, cannot be shaken off in a day. We cannot uproot it without uprooting ourselves. You must side with the illiterate and ignorant majority till such time as the educated and literate minority are prepared to boldly come forward and help and support you in uprooting objectionable prejudices and irreligious practices. The literate minority

only talk and twaddle and are never in the front. As a result the illiterate majority are always in the front and fructifying. Just by the way Bahadurshah Seth, your pardon, for anticipating you. You want to ask me why we *Dastoors* pet and pamper the illiterate and ignorant masses. The answer is simple enough. We do it because they cannot pet and pamper themselves. We do it because you do not educate them or advance them in a way as to make them see and judge for themselves. The literate minority spend their lakhs to pamper themselves and to spoil the illiterate. Education, education my dear sir, is the only means of improvement and advancement. 'It's education that forms the common mind : As the twig is bent the tree is inclined.' Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! The head that composed these lines must by far have been wiser than the wisest head of our wise age. We *Dastoors*, Bahadurshah Seth, have bellies with bellows as big as those of the richest of *Behdins* or some of your *Behdin* journalists and authors. Our greed is the same as theirs. We earn less than we want and spend much more than we ought. A pious *Behdin* is as good as or even better at times than a *Dastoor*. He runs after lakhs and we *Dastoors* do the same. We are as prone to society vices as the *Behdins* are but much less to blame, for, it is the *Behdins* that have taught them to us. We try to abandon them, make up our mind not to bid at races, not to speculate, not to buy and sell shares, not to do many a thing and fail as signally as the *Behdins*. Our sacred investiture and our piety and purity are powerless to help us in that. This is our state pure and simple. The rich *Behdin* stands by and enjoys the fun. A man steeped in vices is jolly glad if he is able to pull another into them. Some Theosophists and others occasionally help the *Dastoors* on with means and money to run in and out of debt for their own selfish ends. You have often told me, Bahadurshah Seth, that once in, even a *Dastoor* cannot get out of it."

"Because perhaps the *Dastoor Saheb's* piety and purity are not over pure and powerful," put in Mr. Mehelooji. "By the way, *Dastoor Saheb*, this young lady here, whom I now call my daughter-in-law, wrote to you some days ago and enquired if you were prepared to initiate her into the tenets and the truisms of Zoraster. You replied that you were sorry you could not do so and that you could not assign reasons for refusing to accede to her request. You will perhaps be gracious enough, dear Dastoor Dehkan, to give us verbally the reasons which you were unable to commit to paper."

"Certainly, Mehelooji Seth, the reasons are simple enough and I am surprised you should not have guessed them. Initiating a *Juddin*—you will pardon me for using this word—into the tenets and truisms of Zoraster plain and simple mean that I should give an undertaking to invest her with the sacred symbols of Zorastrianism by putting the *Sudreh* and *Kusti* on her, in other words that I should perform a *Navjot* or sacred thread ceremony. It is as much as taking my head from my shoulders and putting it into the hands of the hangmen. They will all be down on me and even a Mehelooji or a Bahadurshah will be unable to save me. Those who call me *Dastoor Saheb* and revere and reverence me will then call me all sorts of names. We are what we are. It is you that rule us now. You must improve our position, increase our status and strengthen both before you can expect us to guide you as in the olden times. I am delighted — very greatly delighted indeed to see a Saviour — yes a Saviour in the shape of a simple hearted but great *Behdin* has at last come forward to lift us up out of the abyss of despair and degradation into which we have plunged ; to educate and advance us and to make us self respecting and such as to exact respect and obedience from our constituents. That Saviour is no less a personage than the simple but noble minded Mr. Merwanji

Muncherji Kama who has voted no less a sum than Rupees Twenty-five lacs, all out of his own pocket, for our progress and prosperity. Like the Good Samaritan he has felt our pulse, realized our troubles and not hesitated to relieve them. May Hormuzd bless him and save him as he has blessed and saved us."

"But, my dear *Dastoor*," said Mr. Mehelooji, "I hold in my hands at this minute a letter that you wrote to me when on your travels and in which you have said that proselytism is authorized by our religion and practised as a *revaj* or custom from ages past. You have also said in that letter that the Parsis would not have numbered eighty thousand as at present but for the free introduction of alien blood into it ; such introduction being considered a *poon*, that is, a pious or propitious deed, by old people even now."

"True ! True ! Sethji," replied His Holiness, "but Bombay is not Timbuktoo or China. The best of our rulers when in the land of England and when sailing over the waters of the ocean have expressed views akin to mine on various matters relating to the social, moral and material welfare of those over whom they were coming to hold sway here. Their zest and their zeal, their free speaking and their free thinking have been known to cool and to disappear queerly with the Indian harbour appearing in sight. With one leg *in-situ* and planted on Indian soil the heat and the temperature begin to affect them and the zeal and the zest mix with the air and disappear. So was it, I confess with me. I am thankful to you, Bahadurshah Seth, for calling me to this confessional to-day and inducing me to make a clean breast of it. It is an honourable confessional and I feel honoured in confessing before it. Besides, there is nothing like a confession to relieve a superfluous weight. I know some of you gentlemen say that we *Dastoors* are more of a fool than a knave. Others say that we are more

of a knave than of a fool. I make bold to say that we *Dastoors* hold the same opinion of many *Behdins* who have as little courage of their convictions as ourselves."

"Then you will not, even if I stand behind you, undertake to make a Zorastrian of Miss Macgregor," asked Mr. Bahadurshah.

"That, I will not," said the *Dastoor*, "for I think Miss Macgregor can still be a Zorastrian without its outward symbols. As to her becoming a Parsi, why, she has more of Parsee-ism in her than many of us put together. There can be religion, my dear Bahadurshah Seth, without rites and rituals but there can be no rites and rituals without religion. God meant that there should be only one religion though under different forms. The rites and rituals are the forms. If a man think that he can be a better man by being a Christian than by remaining a Parsi by all means let him become a Christian. Miss Macgregor thinks that as she is about to be united to a Parsi, she should be a Zorastrian. The Parsis say however good and true you may be and whatever your love for our religion we will not admit you into our fold through the front door. There is nothing however to prevent Miss Macgregor from stealing a march into it through the back door which is the pure and simple result of closing the front door. If his wife is not admitted into Zorastrianism Mr. Rustom might go over to Christianity and bring up his children as true and loyal followers of that faith rather than let them be half-castes and bearing contempt and contumely.

"Proselytism is a strange process of manufacture. It is self-propagating and self-progressing and most fructifying in favourable soil and circumstances. So long as the Parsis live in India, proselytism will go on whether they will have it or not, for associations are always strong. You can stop it, not by returning to Iran, for there you will be drawn towards Babi-ism which is another name for Bahaism (which, by the way, is much

superior to idolatry, Budhi-ism and Theosophy), but by establishing a purely Parsi colony somewhere in the wilds of Africa or the antipodes." (Cries of hear hear and well said.)

"What do you think, my dear *Dastoor Saheb*, of the present prospects—social, moral and material, political and religious of our community ?" asked Mr. Bahadurshah.

"Very grave, very grave, and likely to become graver still. They were never less grave. With deep-rooted superstition and long-standing and daily increasing superstitious practices on the one hand, holding strong possession of the minds even of many of your educated men and women with indiscriminate charities ending in loss of independence and self-respect, with the absence of widespread physical culture, with the disappearance of enterprise, commerce and industry, honesty of purpose and intention, with the carefully nurtured and growing distaste for higher education, with the destructive doctrines of Theosophy and its sequel the Ilm-e-Kshnoom which are both artificialities in themselves, the Parsis are rightly and truly between the devil and the deep sea. Theosophy is manufactured amongst us by crafty artizans who hold in their hands the destiny of Parsee-ism and Zorastrianism. Its baneful and wasteful influences which are dressed in the garb of Zorastrianism are too carefully worked to be outwitted. As to the other artifice—Ilm-e-Kshnoom—it is but the step-sister of Theosophy and too palpably horrid to do any but a temporary harm. It has run its course. The elder sister Theosophy though openly friendly to it is inwardly most inimical. The bubble of Ilm-e-Kshnoom will burst but the boil of Theosophy has become chronic and will not end until it becomes a cancer. My dear friends it is getting late. I have to preside at a lecture which is to be given within an hour hence on Parsee-ism by a well-known Theosophist. You stare at me and stand aghast. In answer thereto I beg respectfully to refer you to all that I

have said here a few minutes ago.

"My dear daughter Magdalene, if you will allow me to call you so,—for all good girls be they Parsi, Hindu or Mahomedan or hail from China, Peru or Cochin are but my daughters,—if you will take my advice, think not of becoming a Zorastrian in this smoke-stricken atmosphere of Bombay. When you are in Europe or America ask any *Dastoor* or *Behdin* staying or passing through that land to invest you with the outward symbols if you really want them. As to the other symbols which are the prop and pride of our faith,—*Manashni*, *Ghavashni* and *Kunashni*—you have them already in a greater measure than many of us. Go to America and be reconciled to the person and primitive faith of your proposed partner in life even as was Padmavati, the daughter of Maharaja Sankaldeo of Kanoj, who married our Shah Behramgoor, accepted our faith and whose name is recorded as Sapinood in Parsi chronicles." And so, Rusi, the dear—dear *Dastoor* left us—left us—but not without shaking hands heartily with me once more and promising to bring over the ladies of his household to see me. Bahadurshah tells me that I may take this *Dastoor Saheb* as a fair specimen of his kind, learned but afraid to make use of his learning, well thinking and well intentioned yet timid and impracticable, progressing and yet retrograding, pious and yet full of prejudices, industrious and yet idle, full of words and yet not flowing. Poor dears! How I feel for them and feel for those whose religious advancement and improvement, aye whose salvation has been placed in their charge. Methinks, *Dastoor* Dehkan is right that you *Behdins* are responsible more than they for this very sorry situation. No one perhaps more so than your bunglers and meddlers, your so-called self-constituted *Soshiants* who interpret religion and rituals and tort and twist them and mould and model them to suit what they preach in public and detest in private.

So much for this, Rusi dear. I remember your telling

me I am half a Parson myself, a little of a Pope and much more of a Prelate. Like what Mrs. Todd told her husband the Parson blood is in our family. My father and my uncle were intended for the Pulpit but they chose to join the trade.

I am paying visits to dear Motidana's schools. Mr. Jamshed and Jal and Thriti and Roshan have made the interest of the children their own. Roshan and Thriti are giving lessons thrice in the week at the Parel school where English and Parsi children take lessons. The oil paintings and the medallions are excellent. Motidana appears to be looking down lovingly and speaking to the children and smiling through every line and delineation of them. Whilst I write this, I see my Rusi doing the same from his place on my desk here and from his cosy apartments in Todd Mansion.

Yours for ever,
MAG.

CHAPTER LXII

THE JEST OF FATE COMPLETES ITSELF

"Fate made me what I am, may make me nothing ;
But either that or nothing must I be ;
I will not live degraded."

BYRON.

FATE is inexorable. It is famously fatal. You have to face it whether you wish it or not. Call it by any name but you cannot confound it, much less read it. It will still be Fate. It is a visitation which visits every body and whom every one is bound to entertain whether he be a fatalist or not. Fate works single-handed and double-handed. In the former case it works its own way slowly but steadily. In the latter case it works with your help and you help it to accelerate the end. Circumstances and contingencies have a great deal to do with Fate. One may be happy all his life but end in misery. One may be unhappy all his life and yet may come to a happy end.

Since Erach's death Meherbanoo was a changed woman. She became thoughtful and moody. She kept to her room for hours and would not see visitors. Her whole frame had undergone a transformation. She felt a disgust for her old abode and for her old associates. Her face had acquired a quiet dignity and her demeanour was calm but firm. All fuss and fury had deserted her. She did not ask or beg of Jamshed and Thriti or even Roshan to visit her but they did so of their own accord and she offered no resistance. Ardeshir also visited the house but never approached her and never tried to have so much as a word with her. He had read about remorse and he felt sure it was creeping over Meher-

banoo and eating away the inside of her. Remorse is temporary or permanent. He was not sure if Meherbanoo's remorse had come to stay with her. His disgust for her behaviour had strengthened his resolution to desist from making overtures of friendship. He had also to consult his pride. Jamshed told Thriti that Meherbanoo would never make friends with Ardeshir unless the offer came from him. Months rolled away in this way and at last reconciliation came in a form which was not to be resisted. A daughter was born to Roshan on the same day that a son was born to Thriti. Thriti was at her own house but Roshan was at her mother's. Thriti's confinement was easy enough but not so Roshan's. She was in severe pains which tried all the patience and skill of the doctors. It seemed that the mother should sacrifice her life to save that of her unborn one or that the child should die for the mother. Poor Roshan! All her strength seemed to be ebbing away. The doctors sat by the bed for many precious minutes and racked their brains. There were of course the instruments and there were the fine little knives ready for the medical butchery known in polite language as operation. It was a crisis. Meherbanoo hated the hacking and hewing process. "Take my word for it," she said, "leave it to nature and it will come alright in an hour." The doctors turned up their noses! Who was she to interfere! Nature indeed! Fiddle-sticks! All the same one felt the pulse, another felt the body, a third gave the opiates and the fourth busied himself generally. Minutes followed seconds and the quarters followed the minutes. After the half and the three-quarters, came the strike of the hour. The patient was in extreme pain. Nature was at work. The countenances of the doctors fell; that of Meherbanoo beamed with pleasure. She was now all alert. She cried through her tears that her daughter Roshan was now all in all to her. She, Meherbanoo, lived in her. Just then nature had asserted itself. The patient was free. It was a girl, a miniature Roshan. It would have taken the mother's life but it was not to be.

So Dame Nature often termed Fate had saved the mother and saved the child. It had destroyed the gulf between the mother and the daughter and closed the breach. It had opened the stemmed course of the river running with the milk of human kindness. When the daughter lay between life and death, the father had occasion to come into the daughter's room loaded with messages of all kinds for the mother from those without. The ice was broken. The wife's steeled heart opened. The husband's stagnant one moved and mixed with it. Their girl's safety was the question of the moment. All else was immaterial and unconsequential. The wife's quiet grief appealed to the husband and *vice-versa*. In the handing and the rehanding of things their hands touched. For the first time in her life the wife felt that the husband's interests were hers. They are now united never to part. It seemed as if they were never disunited. Necessity and misery did what the law and the bar could never have effected.

CHAPTER LXIII

THE PANORAMA

" To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late,
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his Gods ? "

MACAULAY.

THE rail road of life of the actors in this story is now smooth and even—even of Shirin. The man of the world Bahadurshah was too shrewd to leave a love-sick girl to her fate. Shirin was his only daughter and the idea of losing her was tortures for him. ' Find out a more suitable man, Bahadur,' he murmured ; ' surely our community holds men better then Rusi ; I will not allow my child to pine away for the sake of that——.' He was going to say something snappish about Rustom but he stopped. With him idea was action. His plan of campaign was to take Shirin out of herself. A round of visits, motor drives, change of scene and air, *soirèes* and select dinners, select plays and cinemas left Shirin no time to think of Rusi. Mr. Minocher, I.C.S., a handsome sprightly young man in high pose and his sister Manijeh were companions in the holiday making. This young man who adorned the service and had risen rapidly in it was a distant cousin of Mr. Bahadurshah. He was now at his special invitation spending his well earned leave with him.

" Shirin, daughter mine, what do you think of Minocher ? enquired Bahadurshah of his daughter when he had occasion to be alone with her.

"What do I think of him, Papa? Why! What a question to ask? What is my opinion worth?" faltered the girl dropping her eyes and looking down.

"It is worth everything. Come Shirin, don't shy. Come, I'll smooth the way for you. I will not beat about the bush. Will not Minocher make a fine husband for a fine little girl, say such a one as my Shirin? Is he not in every way more desirable, if not superior, than the one you have long been thinking of in the light of matrimony without your ever knowing it? Shirin, darling, the other one I speak of is Rustom Delaver."

"I-think of-him-as my husband! Papa! Papa! Surely it is too much even for you," murmured the girl timidly between her tears.

"My darling, I would not be your father if I did not care to watch over your interests or neglected to enter into your feelings or to read your mind. Come, darling, we will talk about it but for once. Rustom with all his faults is a fine man, I know. I also know that my innocent little darling here liked him very much, aye even to the extent of loving and marrying him. I know you were fond of him without knowing that you were."

"Papa! Papa!" cried the girl—but he did not allow himself to be disturbed. "To do justice to Rustom, Silla, I must say that he was equally innocent. He did not know of the feelings you entertained for him and was too honourable to allow you to go on if he but knew them. As to Magdalene, she would surely have sacrificed herself if she had the faintest idea that she was in your way. There! There! Cry away dear, I will not disturb you, for it is so wholesome to give vent to one's feelings in this way. That Magdalene is a saint. She is wiser in worldly wisdom than you. She will keep him well in hand and not spoil him as my Silla would perhaps have done. You were both in danger, as the novelist would say, of crossing each other in love, but there is a better love waiting for you. Come, Silla, I am sorry if I have made you cry, but I am not sorry to have been able to solve a problem for you which you

were vainly endeavouring to do for long. I have opened your mind out to you and you will doubtless thank me for it. Rustom is now practically Magdalene's own. Young Minocher is waiting to be yours if you will only allow it. You have always carried out my wishes and will not disobey me in this. He has my permission to offer his hand to you. Your mother (see, she is quietly hearing what we say) will be delighted to see you wedded to Minocher. Won't you, dear ? " he said, turning to his wife. By way of answer, the dear nodded and drew her daughter close to her heart. They mingled their tears.

" We do not wish," concluded the father, " to force your inclinations darling, but by accepting Minocher you will make yourself and us so supremely happy." He patted her as if she were a babe and left the room leaving the mother and the daughter to themselves.

A month more and Shirin is now Mrs. Minocher Marshal. She does feel that her parents were right. They had worked only for her weal and not worked in vain. How many parents would have done it like this ? How many fathers would have acted like Bahadurshah ?—mild but firm ; kind yet decisive ; frank yet outspoken, loving but not over indulgent !—Echo answers, ' very few '—

This is our last look into Bombay. It only remains for us to look into America for the last time. And then the writer and the reader will have to give up the reins of this story, the strings of which are almost woven. If the reader feel a tithe of what the writer does in preparing to part with the characters of this narrative, which are the creation of his own fancy, the writer will consider his labour well spent and well recompensed.

So let us betake ourselves to the land of the Yankees. Our hero Rustom could well have been born there. In his first letter to his darling Mag, youth like he has painted Yankee land as all gold and no glitter. Youths are not, however, so wise as Age for Yankee land is after all anything but *par-excellence*. It is like

distance lending enchantment to the view. It is not a paradise. It has not yet entirely given up its hatred for the children of the soil, the first born babes of the mother-land, the Hubshees. The President of the Republic had a hornet's nest round his ears for daring to invite a Red Indian in high pose to dine with him. The Hubshee is not to traverse or to cross the path which the heaven-born Yankee does. He is not to travel in the same tram-car or train with him. Rogues and rascals, marauders and pick-pockets abound there as much, if not more, than in any other land. People are free with their gold, of course, but it is often flittered away. The Yankee fight for suppression of strong drink and its manufacture is nothing but a long Yankee yarn—a huge fiasco. Last but not the least—oh! horror of horrors—there is the Lynch-law which takes no count of a Hubshee being burnt alive for daring to love or even to look lovingly or daringly at a white woman. Those who prattle and prate here under the banner of *Swaraj* and *Swadeshism* may well lay this to their heart.

The relieving feature of the situation is the all-powerful Yankee Press with its masterful whip. It is the great monitor which lays its stripes here, there and everywhere. It treats the President and the publicist alike. When will the British *Raj* have such a Press? The Home Government and the Indian Government might well be under the tutelage of the Yankee Press for a while if they are to benefit themselves and their possessions.

It was the 21st day of March in the year——, the grandest day of the Parsis known as the Jamshedi Navroze which beheld the Macgregors, the Bahadurshahs, Minocher and Manijeh, Mehelooji and Chandan, Jamshed Aga and Thriti, Jal and Roshan, Meherbanoo and Ardeshir ascending the steamship *Oceania* which lifted anchor, hoisted its flag and sailed away amidst the deafening cheers, the waiving of handkerchiefs and the vociferous acclamations of the numerous friends and admirers of the fortunate families that were now about to cross the wide wide ocean to plant their feet in the

land of Columbus.

But oh ! the forgetful that I am ! I have left Dastoor Dehkan out of the list. Bahadurshah had prevailed on him to accompany them. He was to be their guest. When on the broad bosom of the sea the *Dastoor Saheb* was one of them. He laid aside his kingly state and his dignity and ate and drank to his full content. He had laid aside all his reserve and even the sacred investiture of his sanctity—the Cashmir shawl. He answered questions freely and frankly as if he were already in Freedom Land. He declared as he had never done before that Jamshedi Navroze was rightly and and properly the New Year's Day of the Parsis and that the Parsis ought to count their New Year from that day. He admitted that he had all along entertained that belief but that times and circumstances were anything but congenial for making such a declaration in his native land. " My dear Bahadurshah Seth," he said, " if the Parsis want to be classed as a progressive community they must give up their long existing factions and merge into one homogenous whole. They may call themselves *Sansahis* or *Kadims* so long as they adopt the *Dini* or *Fasli Sal* and let their prayers, their ceremonies and their rites and rituals to sway them on that basis." He admitted that their community dinners known as the *Ghambars* were unsuited to the times ; that they were always out of season and very unseasonable to boot.

" My dear Ardeshir Seth," he said, " the ladies' *Ghambar* or *Niat* which has now come into fashion is, to my mind, a huge bungle. It is a subterfuge and a hoax and has not a vestige of religion or piety about it. It is a huge mockery."

" My dear Mrs. Aga, we are indeed a community of corpse-bearers. Rightly and truly we are treating our corpse-bearers like beasts of burden and destroying all their sense of self-respect and sensibility.

" But what is worse ! We Parsis though claiming to be a highly progressive community with an economic conscience and

an eye to advancement have locked up a mint—mind you, ladies and gents,—I say a mint of money in red earth and rubble stone in the shape and slippery substance of a hill which we call Doongerwadi. It goes to my heart to see that so much money should lie so stagnant. Ladies and gents, you start; but believe me when I say that the time is not far off when the Parsis will be seriously considering the advisability of disposing of the greater part of Doongerwadi and of utilizing the sale proceeds for the purposes of superior industries and art, mental and physical culture, upto date education, model schools and colleges, central academics, houses and asylums, places of recreation and public resort, play grounds and gymnasiums and such other purposes as are sure to tend to the rise, progress, onward movement and advancement of a community which claims to be the pioneer community all over India. I see you smile superciliously; but if I had said this in Bombay, ladies and gents, fanatic Parsis—for to be sure we have fanatics among us in legion—would have stopped short at nothing. They would have abused me, hurled all sorts of execrations at me and threatened to crush me.

"I mean no disparagement to the existing *Dokhmas* for new *Dokhmas* could be built in a distant but more congenial locality, the present ones being allowed to lie fallow until they could be effaced without encroaching upon feeling and sentiment.

"Ladies and gents, your pardon! But I would say, without risk of contradiction, that we Parsis have tied ourselves but too long to the apron strings of our rulers. It is time now we shake free of that bondage and stand on our own legs fearlessly and valiantly. It is time we husband all our means and resources; form distinct flanks and peregrinate to fresh fields and pastures green. We have been long enough here and more than discharged the debt of obligation to the alien communities and their kings who are said to have done many good turns to us in the past. Recent events have shown that

the people of India want us no more; aye! would even eject us if they could. It is but meet therefore that we should migrate to other parts and form distinct colonies if not actual territories. Times were when Iran and Australia were not prepared to receive us. Times now are when Iran is waiting for us with open arms and Australia and for the matter of that the other British Colonies are not likely to refuse to welcome us."

"Yes, you are right my dear Miss Macgregor," said the Parsi Pope smiling sweet and bowing to that young lady. "I admit that aluminium *garis* or motor cars for carrying dead bodies would be by far a superior and more decent mode of traction and more in keeping with the dictates of our religion. You say, Miss Macgregor, that you dislike your native mode of disposal of the dead, namely, interment or burial and that you prefer our *Dokhma* system and even cremation to it. I quite agree with you. There could be no dirtier, more insanitary or more dangerous mode of disposal of the dead than burial. I know it is coming into fashion amongst us. Cremation is by far the cleaner and quicker mode of disposal. It is sure to supplant all other systems, if not now, a quarter of a century hence. Our religion does not forbid cremation but it surely does forbid interment. The very earth recoils with the idea of the abomination, for a corpse, be it of a Parsi, Hindu or Mahomedan, Hebrew or Chinaman, is nothing but abomination. It pollutes and contaminates the earth. It breeds fever and typhoid, plague and pestilence and ends in disaster and distress. When so saying I certainly do not mean to urge that we Parsis need run after cremation in preference to *Dokhmas* until the latter become impracticable."

"Thank you,—my young friend Jal,—thank you. I hope your applause means that you are quite one with me in the views I have just expressed."

"There! There! Bai Saheb Meherbanoo smiles. She does not speak but I read it in her eyes. She would ask why I did not say

all this in Bombay ? The answer is short and simple enough. We, *Dastoors*, in addition to our eyes, ears and nose have those little hells which are called bellies. They must be filled and so must those of our families."

" Here is to your health ! Ladies and gents, I am glad, mighty glad, we are celebrating the Navroze far away and free from all taint and turmoil and all disagreement and discord on this vast piece of human skill."

" Yes, yes, ask away as many questions as you like, my little Lady of the Lake," he said, landing his pious eyes and jocularly addressing Mrs. Jal, whom we shall still address by the old and familiar name of Roshan. " Yes, my dear young lady, the ladies of our *Dastoor* families have succumbed to fashion, we must confess to our chagrin and consternation."

" Yes, yes, speak out by all means. They ' overdress ' or ' underdress ' and expose their limbs like any fashionable lady and make ducks and drakes of our money."

" My dear Miss Manijeh, you ask me why we don't put our foot down on it ? Easier said than done. Let me ask you a question in return. Have we *Dastoors* got any foot to speak of ? Do we stand on our own legs ? Have we got any backbone to boast of ? The least said the soonest mended. If you remember that you remember everything."

" My dear Civilian *Saheb*, I am proud,—proud to be in the company of a Government officer of such high repute. You ask me if our *Ghe-sarna* or funeral prayer is not a misnomer. So it is ! So it is ! We have no funeral prayer properly so-called for we did not inherit any from our ancestors in ancient Iran. We do not know if there was any funeral prayer in the time of Zoraster appropriate to the occasion. We have, therefore, contented ourselves by merely chanting extracts from the Gathas and other prayers which have nothing to do with either the *las*, the *ravan* or the *Feroher*. The same is the case with our nuptial prayer. Nobody knows

what it was in the Zorastrian era. Our present chantings are in *Pazund*. We certainly do require a proper funeral prayer shorter but more suitable than the present one, and one which will be acceptable in the sight of God and man. But who is to do it ?" he said, bringing his uplifted hand heavily down on the table.

Jal replied, " surely the *Dastoors* ; who but the *Dastoors !* " (A ringing laugh and cries of right, right, went round.)

The *Dastoor Saheb* was quite in his element to-day. He had shaken off all the selfish about him and was for once entirely selfless.

He concluded by saying, " Ladies and gents, every member of a progressive community has the right to determine how his body shall be disposed of. If the Parsis are a progressive community then let every Parsi decide how his corpse should be dealt with. Speaking for myself, I do not care how my carcass is disposed of so long as it is not buried and provided it is not treated like the carcass of a dog but with all the *cens-ceremonium* appropriate to the occasion."

From on the steamer to the shores of America time flew and was not felt. When Columbus landed on American land he could not have received that hearty welcome and that meet reception which our party did. At Rustom's initiative a large and influential gathering was there to welcome them. There were, of course, the Todds, the Tweedhams, the How's-hes, the Timkins and their friends. They knew that those who were connected with Rustom by ties of blood or friendship must be worthy of being received and entertained right royally. They put up at Hotel Columbia. Rusi had eyes for none but for his Mag. Mag seemed to see none but Rusi. As she was in Parsi costume she was taken to be one of them. Rustom had told his Yankee friends that his *fiancée* was to be one of the party. But he had not told them that she was Scottish by birth.

The first thing Mag told Rusi when they were alone was that

she had resolved to be a Zorastrian before she would wed a follower of Zoraster.

"Why not let me become a Christian, Mag ? I am prepared to be one," observed Rusi laughing.

"That cannot be Rusi," returned Mag. "I shall not feel satisfied until I am a Zorastrian for it is the wife that must prove her allegiance and her love for her husband by embracing his Faith. For then alone she could be part and parcel of her partner in life."

"Dastoor Dehkan," continued Mag, "has undertaken to render me two very valuable services. The first is to initiate me into the creed of Zoraster by the performance of the *Navjot* ceremony. The second is to unite us into one by reciting the *Asirvad* prayer over us."

Rustom was all attention and astonished. He could hardly believe his ears. Was he awake or dreaming ? All he did was to press Mag's hand, which he was holding in his own, all the harder.

"But Mag, darling, is not civil marriage all the smoother and much the shorter cut to matrimony ? Besides, we must think of poor Dastoor Dehkan. Will not civilized Parsis, cultured Parsis and progressive Parsis hurl the Papal Bull of Excommunication against poor Dastoor Dehkan's devoted head and put him out of caste and communal doings for the sacrilege ? He will be thinking, talking and acting freely and without fetters so long as he may be in Liberty Land. But let him be again among the Bombay Bigots and he will bid farewell to the dictates of his conscience once again. He will repent, recant, do any penance and undergo any pains and penalties that the self-constituted Parsi Popes may prescribe for him in their blind fury. Oh ! A fig for the danglers who would rather on a gibbet dangle than lose their dear delight to wrangle."

"Rusi dear, don't you know," said Mag, "that there are Parsis who say that matrimony cannot be sanctified or 'religionised,' if I may say so, without the *Asirvad* and that the *Asirvad* is part and parcel of religion. Dastoor Dehkan says we may have a Civil

Marriage after the Parsi marriage and I do not see why it should not be so."

A month passed or rather flew, flew as it were on the wings of the dove, and no one knew whither it had flewn. The day appointed for the *Navjot* and the wedding and which was to make Rusi and Mag the happiest couple on earth, at last dawned. Old John Macgregor was literally lifted up to the skies with joy and pleasure. He forgot all his pains and all his worries, aye, even his lumbago. Philosophy Hall was to be the centre of attraction. The cream and the elite of Yankee Society was collected and felt elated to witness the ceremonies which were to be conducted by the great Dastoor Dehkan of Bombay. Amongst the notabilities there were the President and his wife, Professor Jackson and the other Professors of the Columbia University. There were also the Parsi High Priest of Sindh and Baluchistan Dastoor Dr. Dhala, M.A., Ph.D., and Mrs. Dhala. We must not forget two young Parsi gents of great ability who were then studying at the Columbia University. They were Mr. Pavri, son of Dastoor Khurshedji Pavri, High Priest of the 'Fasli Sal Mandal,' and Mr. Dhala junior.

It was a scene to see and to remember—a vivid panorama. Dastoor Dehkan never acquitted himself so well as now. After the *Sudreh* and the *Kusti* were put on on Mag and the recital of the prayers were over he delivered a sermon. After generalizing over the intent and purport of putting on the *Sudreh* and *Kusti*, the emblems of purity and religion, the *Dastoor Saheb* gradually waxed eloquent and went over to other matters. He gave free and frank expression to his convictions. The whilst he was doing this he had drawn himself upto his full height. His delivery was clear and telling. His face was glowing and had the halo of truth and the hall mark of true religious inspiration about it. His gestures were correct and effective. He seemed to be one of the disciples of Zoraster come to life again.

After the *Navjot* came the *Asirvad*. Dastoor Dehkan performed that equally inspirating and highly solemn ceremony, recited the prayers and sprinkled rice, pomegranate and pieces of cocoanut in the same way as he would have done it in his mother-land.

"My dear daughter here and you my dear son," said the *Dastoor Saheb*, addressing Mag and Rusi, "you are now about to be united in the sight of God and man His masterpiece. I thank Him for selecting me as an humble medium for effecting this union.

"Rustom Delaver have you not taken of your own liking this young lady who will henceforth bear the ancient Parsi name of Tehmina to be your wife and whom you are bound to love, respect and protect during the natural period of your existence?"

"That I have—*Pa-sund-ai-kerdum*," gravely replied Rusi.

"Tehmina *alias* Magdalene Macgregor, have you not of your own liking taken this young man Rustom Delaver whom you are bound to serve, love and obey to be your lawfully wedded husband in the sight of God and man?"

Magdalene lowered her head and repeated the words *Pa-sund-ai-kerdum*.

Then going over to other matters the *Dastoor Saheb* said that the audience should not think that Magdalene had entered upon her adopted faith later than she ought to have done. "No, ladies and gents, putting on the *Sudreh* and *Kusti* on children of seven, eight and nine," said the *Dastoor Saheb*, "is mere Punch and Judy show. The proper age for the *Navjot* as enjoined by our sacred books and at which children undergoing that most important ceremony are supposed to grasp its details and the gravity of the situation is double seven, that is, fourteen.

"Ladies and gents, you ask me if I have made a proselyte to-day—if I have not converted and taken over a Christian to the Zorastrian faith? So I have and so help me God. I will do it over again if needs be, for, is not proselytism enjoined by Zorastrianism and ordered by Zoraster? I care not for what they will say. I care for the great

dictator—Conscience. Conscience, ladies and gents, is another name for God. It is there that He is established. Besides, this young lady here, who bears the time-honoured name of Tehmina, the wife of our ancient hero Rustom, who was the name-sake of the bride-groom here, has long been a truer Parsi and a truer Zorastrian than many born in that faith. I promise, aye, I devoutly promise, that I'll put on the *Sudreh* and *Kusti*, God giving me life and strength, on the progeny of these illustrious progenitors whose hands I have joined to-day. The bride has and her children will have the right—if I have not misread the tenets of Zoraster—to enter our Fire-Temples and all our places of worship wherever they may be. They have a right, more right to do so than many low-caste *Juddins* who are allowed to enter the precincts of our places of worship on pretext of carrying out repairs, renewals, white and colour wash and attention to electric light and fittings.

" My dear daughter Tehmina, in the light of your religious adviser let me advise you always to try and catch at the kernel and not at the outward crust and shell of Zorastrianism which is being forced on us under the guise of Hinduism, Buddhism, Theosophism and Elum-ai-khushnooism. My dear daughter, make it a point to care more for religion than for *revaj* and ceremonies, for *revaj* and ceremonies are not religion. Remember the principle of *Ravanbookh-tagi* for that is the only way for your salvation. Remember that no *poon* or salvation can be purchased by money or ceremonies. It is like offering a bribe to the Almighty. Do not waste your money and your time which is nothing but money in religious luxuries, such as *Nirungdin*, *Humayesh* and *Vandidad*. Economy in human life is taught by economy in nature. Any one who has eyes will see that nature is economising almost every minute and every second. Nothing is wasted in nature. I have no faith in *Chandrokal* or ever-recurring *Baj* or anniversary days for name and fame are not immortal. Above all I have no faith in any new-fangled creed or sect, such as Theosophy, Babi-ism, etc. Rustom

and Tehmina, it only remains for me now to give you my blessings, such blessings as a clear and quiet conscience alone can give you. May He shower His best blessings on you. May you live long, be happy and be the progenitors of a healthy and vigorous progeny.

"Ladies and gents, I hope I have this day lighted such a candle in your land of America as will never die out but will create a zeal and a zest in your Yankee breast to study the great teachings of our Prophet Zoraster and to try and follow them in their pristine condition."

The *Dastoor Saheb* sat down amongst loud and prolonged cheers and acclamations which in the words of the novelist could be heard half a mile off.

Presents and congratulations poured in amain on the happy pair. Rustom was not the Rustom of Bombay. He had developed new looks, new stature and new presence. A gorgeous repast was served out to which those present did ample justice. The chair of honour was given to Dastoor Dehkan. The bride was on his right and the bridegroom on his left hand. Mrs. Dhala sat next to the bride and Professor Jackson was next to the bridegroom.

After the usual toasts were taken, Dastoor Dehkan gave the gathering a further and a more tangible proof of his eloquence and delivery. He was sprightly and humorous.

"Ladies and gents," said he, "if but a month ago any one had told me that I would be on this *par-excellence* land in the midst of such sympathising friends preaching and sermonising and dining with them ; if any one had told me that I would be performing here a unique ceremony such as the one you beheld in this Hall to-day, I would have taken the speaker to be a false prophet. The grand panorama which you have seen to-day will be imprinted in golden letters in the history of this land.

"Ladies and gents, though I am a *Navar* and a *Maratab* and a *Barashnoom* man to boot, I do not consider it a sacrilege to have crossed the seas and sat down to dinner here with you.

I shall not perform penance for it. Ladies and gents, I am not a votary of and do not believe in *zendervana* and *gethikharid* which plain and simple mean laying offerings of gold and silver at God's feet to secure an orchestra seat in the amphitheatre of heaven. (Loud laugh.) The Zorastrian religion says 'as you sow so shall you reap' and no amount of prayers, *mobedism* or *Dastoorism* will save you from pains and penalties for sins which shall be visited on sinners not there but on this earth. Ladies and gents, we have just left the Jamshedi Navroze behind. That is the proper Parsi New Year's Day. The ten days preceding it are the *Farvardegan* or *Muktat* days on which the holy spirits or *Ferohers* are supposed to visit their relatives and friends here. My Bombay friends have often challenged me to make such a declaration in public. I waited to do it in the more congenial atmosphere of Freedom Land and my word of mouth will be transcribed in print in the Land of Fetters. Those who say that the *Farvardegan* days are eighteen in number are men and *mobeds* intent on feasting and fleecing. Ladies and gents, I have been at the *Fasli Sal Muktats* which are mostly free of unrighteous and unreligious forms and practices. I use the word 'mostly' advisedly as large and precious pieces of silver vases and flower bowls, costly tables offered by families rolling in riches mar the purity and simplicity of the occasion and are a danger to the poor and the mediocre."

Long before Dastoor Dehkan landed again in the land of his birth the Bombay papers were replete with full and flowing accounts of his sayings and his doings in America. Minocher had taken care to prime the papers with that powder, little knowing how soon it will ignite and create a conflagration. The American papers also pregnant with the news fanned the flame. There was commotion and stir. There were high words and low words. It was all abuse and but little praise for the *Dastoor*. The orthodox, the bigot, the hallelujah man, the hooliganist, the *alahi-bagia*, the pulpit preacher, the theosophist, the *baghat* and the *kirtankar* were all

up in arms. Let the man come here and we shall make it hot for him ! Yes—by God—that we shall !

Encomiums and eulogiums were now turned into strong adjectives and bitter invectives. Little did Dastoor Dehkan know that the sword of Damocles was hanging over his head. How could he ? For, was he not patted, pampered, extolled and made much of by his followers? Even before the *Dastoor Saheb* touched this land again, committees were formed, meetings were held, pulpit orators and platform dancers overflowed with erudition and it was unanimously resolved that the *Dastoor* should be no longer called a *Dastoor* ; that he should be dethroned and decapitated unless and until he withdrew all that he had said in America, made penitence and recantation in public and offered an unqualified apology.

Poor Dastoor Dehkan ! He knew what the Parsi Anjuman meetings are. He knew that their resolutions which are utterly void of wisdom and common sense are never valid or worth the paper on which they are written. He knew that they would not bear the test of rules and religion for a minute. But he was afraid, mighty afraid, of the king-makers and the king-killers. They were his friend, philosopher and guide. They were the men who indulged and spoiled him and winked at all his vagaries. He had feathered his nest pretty well but if shorn of his Dastoorial wings he would have to give up not only his Cashmir shawl but his constituents. He stood firm for a time, then tottered and at last gave way. He preserved his Dastoorship at the price of his pride and his prestige and what was more important yet—his conscience which he had dubbed his God when in America. Alas for the frailty of human wishes !

Our tourists were now getting anxious to return to Bombay as our I. C. S. friend's leave was nearly up. Rusi was working his way up to a partnership in the firm of Messrs. Todd & Tweedham but he could not be a partner until he had earned the citizenship.

Mehelooji doubted the wisdom of the step he had taken as his successor's right place was by his side in Bombay. His face clouded when he thought that Rusi's interests and his marriage with a Scottish damsel would tie him down more, perhaps for ever, to America than to Bombay.

If the Parsis would only look at things more rationally and preserve the balance of their mind, couples like Rustom and Mag would keep with them and not away from them. They would not benefit other countries and other people at the expense of their own. In the present case there was also a fair prospect of Bombay's loss being the gain of America. Mehelooji thought he would not be astonished if his large gains added to America's larger hoards in the not far distant future.

"It's a splendid couple" said the Yankees, "splendid even for our Pasac—Our Happy Valley Home. To look at them is to feel perflated. We wonder if the Parsis in their far off home are all like those now with us: so nice; so fine; so handsome; so elegant; so stylish and yet so simple; so large-hearted and so—. It would be a sorrowful day when they leave us to go and seek their mother's nest. But by God we shall not allow them to do that."

The reader will see that all this was no Yankee yarn. It was all real and earnest. The Yankees are outspoken, not exclusive and reserved, or at times, uninviting and obdurate like our friend the John Bull. No offence meant but our dear John Bull is like hard snow which melts only under haughtier heat. All the same our John Bull is very dear to us and by God all the wealth of Yankee land shall not tempt us to part with them. We and they and they and we must stand or fall together.

CHAPTER LXIV

FAREWELL

" Farewell, if ever fondest prayer,
For other's weal availed on high
Mine would not all be lost in air
But waft thy name unto the sky."

BYRON.

IT is as difficult a task for an author to complete a book as to commence it. The former is perhaps more so, for the author is then bidding farewell to and taking leave thereof. But the reader's task is not half so difficult. If he doos not like the book he skips over and welcomes the end. Not so with the author in whom there is a peculiar partiality for his pets. His characters are his children and like all fond parents he is just as partial to the bad and the better as to the best. The pain of parting is therefore as excruciative with the father of a book as with the father of a family. The author of a book's being is with the children of his fancy, with their sayings and doings, with their fortunes and misfortunes, with their vagaries and vicissitudes and with their good luck and bad luck considerably longer than any reader who may read their history and yawn or applaud. It is sad, sad indeed, to trace human vagaries, human vices, human follies and human foibles, human sins of commission and of omission through their varied steps and stages and through their multifarious and muddy details. The only relieving and encouraging sunbeam on the author's horizon is human virtue with its mixed and unmixed goodness, for vice like virtue is not unqualified. To the pater-familias his family is, if not his world, the small republic over which he presides. It is the haunt which he constantly haunts to keep out hunters,—hunters

animate and inanimate, who would wreak ravages and devastate and lay waste his small republic. The author's world is more extensive. It is the outside world. His family mean a multitude. He selects such as he likes and deals with them. He is at his best when he is amongst his own people and works within his own fold and does not try to penetrate into other peoples' dens. He is at his best when he builds and does not borrow, when he constructs and does not convert. Like charity his work begins at his own home. His duty is by his own home and hearth. If he can conceive and conjure, collect and create, speak and not spatter, control and not confuse, he is a good author, a successful writer and a sound critic, be he seeing or even blind. Pen and paper are a sacred charge, a divine trust. The man who trifles with them breaks His commandments and is a criminal. Pen is a dangerous weapon, a double-edged tool which if not well wielded turns round and wounds the wielder. It hurts more than it heals. It is like a razor in the hands of Darwin's two footed, who, according to that great writer, was our progenitor and whose power of caricature is so pre-eminent.

'Tell me of any animal whom I cannot imitate ' said the ape.

'Tell me', said the fox, ' of any animal that can imitate you.'

The class of writers who only borrow and do not build, who convert and do not construct, who copy and do not contemplate is like that illustrious progenitor of ours always cutting the throat and not shaving the beard. This class abounds with the penny-a-liner, the plagiarist, the platitudinarian, the social, moral, religious and economic scribbler, the conventional caterer to popular taste and prejudices, the master dancer to the gallery, be he a mere scribe, an editor, an author, a publisher or a versifier. It is this class that is always looking abroad for cut and dried food and vantage and never cares to look straight at home ; who thinks that all materials for novel writing good, bad or indifferent are enshrouded in the western climes and they must either import them wholesale or convert and confuse them. It is nothing but a stratagem.

I have kept fully in sight the fact that human nature is the same all over the world and that the best fields to cultivate and that the best thing to do is to clean our own Augean stable, to remove the dust and filth from within our own fold and to wash our own dirty clothes at our own doors. We have good and bad men, clear-headed and addle-pated, educated and ignorant and plenty of material to form food for a new novel every half year.

I have selected a blind girl for my heroine for two reasons. The first is that I am blind. Though apparently all seeing, only one-fourth the world is seeing—of the rest, one-fourth is purblind. The remaining half consists of people who have eyes but will not see, who have ears but will not hear, who have tongues but will not speak. The second is that I have read novels with a blind hero or a heroine. The titles of these books are indicative of the great physical disability under which the hero or the heroine labours. The reader is led to believe that he is to read more of the blind hero or heroine or more about blindness and its concomitant of good and evil than about love and other matters. A glance, however, through only a few pages mean serious disappointment. The blind hero or the heroine is mercilessly pushed aside and the reader finds himself throat deep in the dirty waters of love-stricken lords and ladies, gents and gendarmes, rivals and the rivalry, disappointment and discord ending often in a dismal doom, dire fate and disgust and distaste for all that is human and only sometimes in subsequent peace and happiness. I am one of those in whom praise creates no ecstasy for I am not easily extolled ; upon me cavil and carping inflict no cuts. I'll take all the criticism good or bad in the order of things and value them at their market prices. They are a tax on one's patience. It's not ratable. The reader who reads and digests and coolly and impartially contemplates over my pages is my best friend. He is to my mind the best judge of my humble work and worth and of my characters and their conduct. I have traced Parsi life and living, men and manners, their faults and

defaults, their religious cant and unlawful observances, their good points and their bad points, their verbosity and verbiage, their volume of talk and volleys of unavailable shots, their great sayings and little doings through their various forms and phases in my public writings and in the novels which I have ere this published in Gujarati. I leave this work in your hands with perfect confidence. Cull and collect such portions as you can take a fancy to and let the rest be buried in its own cover.

So once again I say farewell. If chance bring us together again it can only be if I be assured that what I have written is not only approved but appreciated. If I have been too much before you and have not kept behind the scenes I will ask you to excuse me for it. *Adieu.*

CHAPTER LXV

MORAL

NO story is wholesome, no novel is nice unless it has a moral. Every man has his own way of drawing morals. The author has no right to tell the reader what moral he should draw from his narrative. I shall, therefore, content myself with quoting below the reflections of the great Persian poet—the Homer of the East—Firdausi. They convey a moral which is worth its weight in gold and which fits in with this story :—

"O ye, who dwell in Youth's inviting bowers
Waste not, in useless joy, your fleeting hours,
But rather let the tears of sorrow roll,
And sad reflection fill the conscious soul.
For many a jocund spring has passed away,
And many a flower has blossomed, to decay ;
And human life, still hastening to a close,
Finds in the worthless dust its last repose.
Still the vain world abounds in strife and hate,
And sire and son provoke each other's fate ;
And kindred blood by kindred hands is shed.
And vengeance sleeps not—dies not, with the dead.
All nature fades—the garden's treasures fall,
Young bud, and citron ripe—all perish all."

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